

SERMONS

1021. c. 2

ON THE

Following Subjects;

VIZ.

Of the Worth of the Soul,
and the Folly of losing it.

On divine Providence.

Of the Connection between
Faith and Salvation.

The Wisdom of worldly Men,
a Reproof to that of good
Men.

Of the Government of the
Spirit.

Of the prevailing Love of
Pleasure.

Of Declensions in Religion.

Of the Abuse of national
Privileges.

By J O H N B A R K E R.

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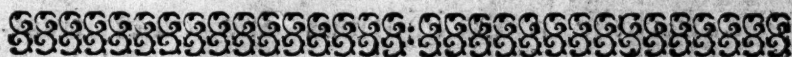
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S E R-



S E R M O N I.

Of the WORTH of the SOUL, and the
FOLLY of losing it.



M A R K viii. 36, 37.

*For what shall it profit a Man, if he
shall gain the whole World, and lose
his own Soul? Or what shall a Man
give in Exchange for his Soul?*



THE Evangelist *Matthew* relates this
Expression of our Saviour very much
as I have now read it from *St. Mark*
(a) : But *St. Luke* hath it thus, *What*
is a Man advantaged, if he gain the whole World,
and lose himself, or be cast away (b) ?

B

The

(a) Matth. xvi. 26.

(b) Luke ix. 25.

2 *Of the Worth of the Soul,* Sermon. I.

The Word here translated *Soul*, it should be owned, is in the preceding Verse rendered *Life*; and its being rendered *Soul* here, does not at all abate the Force of our Saviour's Argument, but strengthens it; for if it will not profit a Man to gain the World at the Expence of his *Life*, much less at the Expence of his *Soul*; which is properly the Man himself, and *Life* in the highest Sense of all.

But you will see the Beauty and Strength of this Expression, when I remind you, — that our Saviour having just been telling his Disciples plainly, what he had often obscurely hinted to them before, *viz.* “ that he was shortly to
“ suffer the most injurious and cruel treat-
“ ment, and then submit to an open and igno-
“ minious death, under the power of which he
“ should continue for a time,” puts it to them; Whether they would own and run all Hazards with him, and so lose their Lives, or desert him, and so save them. They might do the latter if they chose it; if they preferred a few Years Enjoyment of this temporal Life to an Interest in him, and the Glory and Happiness he was able to bestow. But then he would have them consider how this would issue at last, and what would be the certain Effect of their Choice. By this inglorious Desertion they would incur the Guilt, and endure the dreadful Punishment of Apostacy; and so lose (much more than their Lives, and those Grandeurs of the World of which they were vainly dream-
ing,

Serm. I. *and the Folly of losing it.* 3

ing, viz.) their precious Souls, and all the Glory and Felicity of everlasting Habitations.

Now what wise Man would make such a Choice as this? Who, in his Wits, would take a Moment to consider what he should do? The Case determines itself to every Man of common Discretion. *For what shall it profit a Man to gain the whole World, and lose his Life?* No present Possessions are an equivalent for that; because the Loss of that, is the Loss of *them*; when that expires, they pass into other Hands. The Moment our Eye is shut by the Hand of Death, the Glory and Lustre of this World vanish; let who will behold and enjoy them, they are dead to us for ever. — And what is infinitely worse, this will bring a Sentence of Death on the SOUL. And if the Worth of Life be more than the World, that of the Soul is inconceivable and invaluable.

Here then is a Proposition of great Truth and Importance laid before the Disciples, and all the World, by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, viz.

That the Loss of the Soul is the greatest and most irreparable Loss that can befall us; and therefore it most highly concerns us to use the proper Means and Endeavours to prevent it.

In the Words which contain the Proposition just mentioned, you may observe our Lord first lays down a Supposition, and then draws an Inference from it.

(1.) He lays down a Supposition for the Sake of an important Inference to be drawn

from it. And this Supposition includes in it two more. The first an impossible one; *viz. That a Man should gain the whole World.* A Thing vastly beyond all human Capacity; whether we understand by it the Wealth or the Dignities of the World. In vain doth Covetousness court the one, and Ambition the other: Both meet with a sharp and galling Disappointment. It is very little of the World that either of them are able to gain; and they are sometimes quickly compelled to part with what they have eagerly grasp'd. — But the other is a very possible Supposition indeed; and I am afraid a probable one too, *viz. That the Soul may be lost.* Experience shews the Truth of this. The Worth of the Soul doth not preserve it. Souls are often lost — lost in the World they are in Pursuit of — lost carelessly and presumptuously — lost by Covetousness, Ambition, Voluptuousness, and many other Vices and Lusts of Men, as the Engines and Artifices of Satan, by which he draws them into Perdition; and that sometimes after a fair and promising Prospect of their being saved. — Now from these two Suppositions connected,

(2.) Our Lord draws an important Inference; *viz. That he who loses his Soul for the Sake of any present Gain (even that of the whole World, if it were possible) makes a very sad Bargain; acts a very weak Part; incurs a heavy Guilt; and brings upon himself a just, tho' a very severe and intolerable Punishment.*

What

Serm. I. *and the Folly of losing it.*

5

What shall it profit a Man? that is, it shall not profit him; no, it will injure him, it will reproach, it will undo him; this Folly will bring Destruction; this Pursuit end in Ruin. By putting the Words in the Form of a Question, our Lord more vehemently affirms the Folly and Misery he intends to expose and prevent.

And now, Sirs, we are entering upon a Subject of very great Importance; a Subject which needs and deserves to be well considered by every one that hath a Soul to be saved or lost; a Soul, I say, which will either perish by our Neglect and Folly, or be preserved for God, and prepared for Heaven. I desire and hope therefore to engage my own as well as your Attention, while I carefully and seriously consider it in the following Method.

- (I.) Enquire what the Soul is.
 - (II.) What is meant by losing the Soul.
 - (III.) How this Loss is generally occasioned.
 - (IV.) Represent the Greatness of the Loss.
 - (V.) Expose the Folly of hazarding the Loss of our Souls on any Consideration.
 - (VI.) Enquire how the Loss of them may be prevented. And,
- (*Lastly,*) Conclude with a suitable Application of the Subject. — And may the *Father of Spirits* succeed this Attempt to prevent their Misery and Ruin!

(I.) I am to enquire what the Soul is.

B 3

And

And here I do not intend to enter into a philosophical Account of the Nature and Properties of a Spirit, as it is distinguished from Body or Matter; nor will I pretend to have a clear comprehensive Idea of a Spirit; nor is it needful we should, in order to discourse intelligibly about it, or to do what is necessary to preserve it from Ruin. It is enough for us to know what the Holy Scriptures intend, and what our Saviour Christ meant by it, who was pleased to distinguish himself as the great Lover and Saviour of Souls.

The *Hebrews* understood the Word *Soul* in a great Variety of Senses: Sometimes for *Appetite* or *Inclination* (*c*); more frequently for the *Life* of Man (*d*); often for the *Person* or whole Man (*e*); now and then for the *Spirit* or *Breath*, which is the Principle of animal Life common to Men and Brutes (*f*). But the principal and most considerable Sense of the Word among us unquestionably is, *the reasonable and immortal Soul*; the Spirit that comes from God, and *returns* at the Death of the Body *to him that gave it*; that noble spiritual Substance, of which God is the Father; which is his proper Offspring, and the Seat and Subject of our Thoughts and Reasonings; which is endowed with Understanding and Will; is capable of Desire and Hope, has the Liberty to
accept

(*c*) Job xxxiii. 18. Prov. xiii. 25.

(*d*) Psal. lxxviii. 5. Rev. xvi. 3. 1 Sam. xxvi. 21.

(*e*) Lev. iv. 2. v. 2. vii. 18. Prov. xi. 25.

(*f*) Gen. ii. 7. Job xii. 19.

Serm. I. *and the Folly of losing it.* 7

accept or refuse, and which may be influenced by the Promises of Reward, or the Threatnings of Punishment. *Fear not them, (saith Christ) who kill the Body, but are not able to kill the Soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both Soul and Body in Hell, Matth. x. 22.* In which Passage our Lord asserts the Existence of the Soul in a separate State, and its Perception of that Existence, as well as its different Nature from the Body. *This* may be killed, but *that* cannot. It survives the Body; lives in Vigour, while *that* lies in Ruins; and defies the Power which is fatal to Flesh and Blood.

And it is plainly the general Sense of Mankind, that the Soul is an immaterial and immortal Substance, capable of future Happiness or Misery; and which will be rewarded or punished hereafter as it behaves here. And they who strive to disbelieve this, are not able to do it thoroughly; the very Capacity by which they argue stares them in the Face, and flashes Conviction; and that Conscience to which they are not just and faithful, constrains them to believe and fear, what they profess or pretend to deny. But,

(II.) What is meant by losing the Soul? I answer,

(I.) *Not the Annihilation or Extinction of its Being.* This, I am apt to think, is the Way in which many wish their Souls might be lost. This the Hope, (if it deserve the Name of Hope) this the miserable Refuge, and fatal

Delusion of a great Part of Mankind. They would be content to die like Brutes, if they might be permitted to live like them; would gladly part with the Glory and Distinction of their Natures, to part with the Fear of future everlasting Sufferings.

But all this is a groundless Imagination. Souls are immaterial and immortal Creatures. God hath designed them for a perpetual Duration. And the Annihilation or Extinction of their Being, can never be proved from any just Principles of Reason or Revelation. The Notion is unphilosophical as well as unscriptural; and tends to give us unworthy Apprehensions of God, to carnalize and brutify our immortal Natures, and to weaken, nay, utterly destroy the Force of those Promises and Threatenings, which are wisely intended by the righteous Lord and Lawgiver of the World, to prevent their Ruin, and promote their Happiness.

Nor (2.) *By the Loss of the Soul are we to understand the Loss or Deprivation of any of its natural Powers or Capacities as a Spirit.* It were well for the World of miserable Spirits, if their Punishment consisted only in the Loss of any of their original Powers, whereby the Consciousness of their Guilt, or Sensibility of their Anguish might be abated. But from the Consideration of the Nature and Punishment of the fallen Angels, we have Reason to think and to tremble at the Thought; that the natural Powers and Capacities of the miserable Soul

Soul will be preserved in intire Vigour, though that may increase its Punishment, and make it capable of greater Degrees of Anguish, both from Conscioufness and Sensation. A Thought, which if the most harden'd Sinner in the World did duly ponder, he durst not deride it. But,

(3.) *By the Loss of the Soul we are to understand the total Loss of its Rectitude and Happiness.* I say, the *total* Loss; because, though Sinners are depraved in a great Degree in this World, and in Proportion to their present Depravity will be their future Infelicity; yet, blessed be God, the Traces of his Image on the Souls even of the worst of Men, are not so utterly lost, but they are capable of being restored, if they humbly commit them into his Hands, *to be created in Christ Jesus to good Works (g).* Our Souls are therefore never said to be totally lost, till the Day of their Salvation is finished; then, and not till then, the Disease they have contracted by Sin becomes absolutely incurable, and by Consequence their Misery extreme and unavoidable.

In a Word, Souls are then lost when they pass out of this World in a Condition of Sin, and enter into a State of final and everlasting Misery; which Misery the sacred Scriptures set forth under the most dreadful Images that can awaken or alarm the human Mind. And instead of labouring to enervate or explain away the Force of such Scriptures, We should act
more

more worthy our rational Natures, in seeking to avoid the infinite Misery they threaten, by a true and timely Repentance, and by *fleeing for Refuge to lay Hold of the Hope* the Gospel sets before us (b). — But the Greatness of this Misery will be more particularly enlarged upon under another Branch of the Subject. I am now to consider,

(III.) How the Loss of the Soul is generally occasioned. To this I answer,

Not by a particular divine Decree, which seals any Soul under an absolute Necessity of perishing for ever, notwithstanding all the Endeavours it can use to prevent it.

Nor by such an Incapacity of Nature derived to us from our Parents or Progenitors, as renders us utterly unable to embrace the Terms of Salvation offered in the Gospel.

Yet Souls are lost a thousand Ways; according to the different Conditions and Circumstances of Men, and their several Disadvantages and Temptations in Life. Some are born in Pagan Darkness; others in Popish Superstition; and many Protestants little understand and less improve the divine Light and Liberty they enjoy; some have but few Means and Helps, and are far from being happy in their spiritual Advantages and Guides. Not to mention the different Dispositions of Men, and their Aptness to receive or resist Impressions. Nor can it easily be said how great a Hand Satan may have in promoting and enforcing those Means which

(b) Heb. vi. 18.

which tend to the Ruin and Destruction of the Soul.

But all the various Ways by which Souls are usually lost, I think may be reduced to these five.

(1.) Ignorance.

(2.) Impiety.

(3.) False Dependence.

(4.) Delay of Repentance.

(5.) An inordinate Love of the World.

(1.) *Ignorance.* Which denotes the Character of the stupid careless Man, who will not trouble his Head to enquire whether he hath a Soul or no, or if he has, what will become of it when he dies.

Ignorance, if it be invincible, God's abundant Goodness will doubtless incline him to Pity. And we may reasonably suppose this Compassion will extend to poor Creatures in Proportion to their Want of the Means of Knowledge, or of a Capacity to improve them. Honesty of Heart, Sincerity of Endeavour, a Desire to know the Mind of God, and an Attention to such Discoveries as he is pleased to make of it to us, will doubtless, under great Disadvantages for Knowledge, be accepted by a Being of infinite Condescension and Benevolence.

But the Ignorance here intended, is that which proceeds from Sloth, is increased by Carelessness, and produces Neglect of clear and acknowledged Duty. Ignorance that might easily be conquered, and that is evidently chosen; which is attended

attended with a Hatred of Knowledge ; occasioned by a wilful Waste of Time, mispending the Sabbath, and disregarding the Worship of God : That betrays an Aversion to Religion and spiritual Exercises ; disposing Men to put those Things far from them, and to prefer every Trifle before them ; to read a News-paper or Play, rather than the Bible ; to hear any idle Tale rather than a Sermon ; to delight in any Company rather than a Religious Assembly ; and to ask any impertinent Question, rather than that important one, *What shall I do to be saved ?* — This is the Ignorance that debases, prostitutes, and destroys the Soul : of which God brings so heavy a Complaint by his Prophets against the *Jews* ; and to the Account of which Christ lays the Ruin and Destruction of the Generality of Mankind. *This People's Heart is waxed gross, and their Ears are dull of Hearing, and their Eyes they have closed, lest they should be converted and healed (i).*

(2.) Another Thing by which the Soul is often ruined, is *Impiety*. This denotes the Character of a Man who *lives without God in the World*, and in the habitual Love and Practice of Sin.

And how many of the human Race fall under this Description, and yet are not ashamed of it ! Piety is the Subject of their Mockery. All Appearances of it are called *Hypocrisy* ; and the Expressions of it *Cant*. The Love and Fear of God is with them *Enthusiasm* ; and a
fober

(i) Matth. xiii. 15.

sober Profession, *Disimulation*. Thus they mock their Maker, by deriding that in which others resemble Him. Nor are the Laws of the second Table a Jot better observed than those of the first, unless it be by Accident, or for their own Interest and Advantage.

And hence it comes to pass that *they live to themselves*; *are overcome of Evil (k)*; indulge to all *Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit (l)*; *are overcharged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness (m)*; *filled with Wine wherein is Excess (n)*; and *are sensual, not having the Spirit (o)*. Their Intemperance is not an accidental Failing, nor their Lewdness the Effect of Surprise, but their Choice and Habit. In their Passion they swear without Reserve; and at other times, as it were, in the Gaiety and Gladness of their Heart. They lye for Gain, and often for Sport, and will stick at nothing their Appetites demand, and the Devil suggests; whose *Children they are*, and whose *Works they do*. The Consequence of all which must needs be the Loss of their Souls. You have many a black Catalogue of such Sinners in the Holy Scriptures, and many Herds of them up and down in the World.

(3). The Soul is often lost by a *false Dependance*, which denotes the Character of a Man who knows he has a Soul, but is for saving it with as little Trouble as possible; and therefore trusts it on the first Bottom he lights of,

(k) Rom. xii. 21. (l) 2 Cor. vii. 1. (m) Luke
xxi. 34. (n) Eph. v. 18. (o) Jude 19.

of, that promises to carry him the shortest and easiest Way to Heaven.

But let it be remembered, that all Grounds of Dependance are false, that are not declared or warranted in the Word of God. It is very good and gracious in Him, so plainly to lay before us in his Word those Terms whereon we may safely rely for Acceptance and Salvation; which, however Men may mistake or pervert them, are still the same; and for certain, no other than these; *viz. Faith in Jesus Christ, Repentance of Sin, and a sincere, uniform, persevering Obedience.* — Not a Zeal for favourite or Party-Opinions; not a Fondness for Traditions, or external Observances; not a mere Profession, or a dead Faith, or a legal Righteousness; or any Thing inconsistent with the Love of God, or consistent with the Practice of Sin; not Devotion without Holiness, or Justice without Sobriety, or Benevolence without Faith; nor any one Thing, however amiable or important, without other Things that are declared equally essential and necessary. Great Caution Circumspection and Sincerity of Heart should therefore be used, that we do not mistake the Grounds of our Dependance, and build our Hopes on a shifting Sand, instead of a firm unshaken Rock.

(4.) The Soul is often lost by repeated *Delays of Repentance.* Which denotes the Character of a Man, who tho' he is sensible of the Importance of his Soul, and knows the Way in which it must be saved, and forms a Purpose to

to provide for its Salvation, yet does not consider the Necessity of doing this *immediately*; and so loses his Soul before he is aware.

Such a Man, when his Friends, or his own Reflections convince him that *this* or *that* is wrong, and unjustifiable, pretends he hath not Time to alter it now, though he intends to do it hereafter. "Such a Business settled, such a Point gained, such a Scheme executed, and then he will set about a Reformation in good Earnest; and every Body shall see it in his Conduct." But it happens, that this is what no Body ever does see. The set Time never comes; no such Change is made. The Man's Heart deceives him; and whilst he is wise enough not to let others cheat him in the least Matters, he is weak enough to cheat himself in the greatest. How many Souls are lost by such Procrastination! Convictions of Sin, Warnings of Conscience, Softness of Heart, and many hopeful Symptoms, and promising Appearances vanish and come to nothing through this fatal Deceit.

But why should not Observation and Experience make us wise? Will not prudent Men do important Things out of Hand? Is not the delaying what we admit necessary to be done a just Ground for Suspicion that we intend not to do it at all? Can we give any good Evidence of the Sincerity of our Purposes without a speedy Execution of them? Our Time, our Hearts, the Means needful for the Execution of our Designs, are not always in our Power.

How

How often then must we be reminded of the Folly of *Felix* in putting off the Apostle to a *more convenient Season* (p); and of the Wisdom of the *Psalmist*? *Who made Haste, and delayed not to keep God's righteous Judgments* (q).

(*Lastly.*) Another Thing which often ruins the Soul, is an *inordinate Love of the World*. This denotes the Character of the Man whose Heart is so set upon the Pleasures and Profits of the World, that he is resolved to secure as much as he can of them at all Adventures, whatever becomes of his Soul.

As to the *Pleasures* of the World, they are either lawful or unlawful. The latter undeniably pollute, debase, and wound the Soul. And the excessive or immoderate Love even of those Pleasures that are lawful, has the same destructive Tendency. And our Love of them is excessive and sinful, when it leads us to consume too much of our Time, impair our Health, waste our Substance, and is inconsistent with a proper Care of the main Concerns of Life. Such an intoxicating Love of worldly Pleasures, cannot fail to end in the Loss of the Soul. Especially as in the Nature of Things it will exclude the Thoughts of God from our Hearts, extinguish his Love there, and render us unfit for any Society with him. *Lovers of Pleasures more than Lovers of God* (r). I hope I speak to no such Persons as these. But the Taste of the present Age, and the many Places
and

(p) Acts xxiv. 25. (q) Psal. cxix. 60. (r) 2 Tim. iii. 4.

and Sorts of Diversions contrived to tempt all Ranks of People to mispend their Time and Money, neglect their Families, disorder their Affairs, and *ruin their Souls*, render such a *Caveat* as this not altogether unseasonable to the best of us.

And then as to an inordinate Love of the *Profits* of the World; it is a Vice which draws after it many others, such as Injustice, Oppression, Fraud, Guile, Selfishness, Hardness of Heart, and an uncharitable and uncompassionate Temper. Our Lord aware of the Danger of this Vice to the Soul, cautions his Disciples against it by a double Warning, *Take Heed and beware of Covetousness (s)*. The Text I am upon likewise implies no small Hazard to the Soul from an inordinate Desire of the World. Great Reason then was there for the Apostle *John's* Caution, 1 *Joh. ii. 15. Love not the World, neither the Things of the World*; and for the Apostle *Paul's* Observation, 1 *Tim. vi. 9. They that will be rich (i. e. right or wrong) fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition.*

These now are some of the most usual Ways, by which Men ruin and destroy their immortal Souls.

But to proceed, let us consider,

(IV.) How great a Loss this is.

The Text evidently intimates the Loss of the Soul to be very great. But this may be illustrated by the following Considerations.

C

(1.) If

(s) Luke xii. 15.

(1.) If we consider the native *Dignity* and *Excellence* of the Soul. The Soul is of divine Original, the Image and Offspring of God, the Seat and Subject of Reason, conscious of its own Existence and Liberty, and capable of contemplating the divine Nature, Perfections, and Providence, with suitable and correspondent Sentiments and Regards. It is highly exalted above the whole Animal Creation by its Understanding, Liberty, and active Powers. — Knowledge is pleasant to it as Light to the Eye; every Degree of it increases its Joy: And the Mind seeks after it as a Miser seeks for hid Treasure. Sensible Things are soon exhausted and disrelished, and therefore the Soul inclines and turns to intellectual Objects, which are more noble and suitable to its refined Taste and Nature.

But here it is fit I should confess what cannot be denied, and ought not to be concealed, *viz.* the Depravation of the Soul, and its moral Incapacity to please God, to relish spiritual Delights, and to form those Purposes and Pursuits which best become the Dignity of its Nature. O, the mean, the low, the unworthy Pursuits of some Souls! as if they were quite carnalized, and converted into Flesh and Blood! — But this is their Disease and Reproach; the Distemper they have contracted by their Departure from God. *The God of this World hath blinded them; and they care not to retain the blessed God in their Knowledge (t); but are Atheists (or as we render it) without God in the World (u); alienated from*

(t) Rom. i. 28.

(u) Eph. ii. 12.

from the Life of God through the Ignorance and Blindness that is in them (w). This is too plainly the Case of those Souls, whose natural Aversion to God and Goodness is not overcome by a superior Power; who have found no Eye to watch their early Inclinations; no Hand to weed out the Tares sown in the Heart by the Enemy of Souls; no incorruptible Seed, no Word of Truth to beget them again unto God; no divine Almighty Power to heal and change them, to superinduce the Divine Image, and *create them after God in Righteousness and true Holiness (x).*

But still there is an original and unchangeable Excellency in the Soul; and without the Addition of any new Powers, it is capable of every Thing great and good, and glorious; of surveying the several Ranks and Orders of Being in the Universe, and of ascending to God the Fountain of all Being; and of having its natural Capacity improved into *Glory, Honour, and Immortality.*

And is it not Pity that such a Creature as this should be lost? Who would not grieve to see it deceived with Appearances, mocked with Shadows, abused with Flattery and Falshood, allured with artful Insinuations, and cheated with lying Vanities? To see it sunk lower than the Earth; fallen into Servitude! Servitude to Satan, who means to destroy it! to brutal Lusts, sensual Appetites, and sordid Inclinations! — Have we no generous Pity or Disdain in us? no Love of Liberty? no Sparks of Honour? no remaining Desire to emerge, to break our Chains,

C 2

or

(w) Eph. iv. 18. (x) Eph. iv. 24.

or quit our Bondage? — Have we not heard that God is in Christ reconciling this World unto himself? Is it no Joy to us to behold the Light of the Gospel, and to observe its beneficent Design? Do not we know that we are redeemed to God by the Blood of his Son, and may be renewed by the Spirit of his Grace, and happily recovered out of the Ruins of the Apostacy by Faith and Repentance, by Righteousness and Holiness of Truth? And that this Gospel is appointed by Christ to be preached to every Creature? Let us lay these Things to Heart then, and put these precious Souls of ours into the Hands of their Redeemer, to be formed and fitted by his Grace for the Happiness they were made capable of.

(2.) The Greatness of the Soul's Loss appears from its *Duration*. The Soul being an immaterial Substance is free from the Seeds of Mortality and Corruption; and is not only capable of Immortality, but designed for it; and therefore is said to *return to God* when the Body dies (y). If we lose the World, we lose nothing but what is in its own Nature perishable; (*for the Fashion of the World passeth away*;) and suffer no other Loss than what may possibly be repaired. But the Loss of the Soul is irreparable and eternal.

Our Souls must live for ever; there is no Extinction of their Being, if they perish we are undone, their Loss reaches beyond the Grave; we shall carry it with us into the other World; where

(y) Eccl. xii. 7.

where it will be the Subject of our Lamentation and Sorrow for ever.

To lose an *immortal* Soul then for the Sake of any temporary Enjoyment, is surely the greatest Folly the human Nature is capable of. And that I may leave the Impression deep on your Hearts, I will quote a Passage, the Language and Force of which will discover its Author to every one who is acquainted with his Writings. Speaking to a man who thus inconsiderately throws away his Soul, he says, "How wilt thou excuse thy Fault or avert thy Doom? What Arguments or Apologies shall defend thy Cause against the Pleadings of thy Judge? nay, what Armour shall defend thy Soul against its own wounding Self-Reflections hereupon? When every Thought shall be a Dart! and a convicted Conscience, an ever-gnawing Worm; nay, a fiery Serpent, with endless Involutions winding about thy Heart!"

(3.) The Greatness of the Soul's Loss appears from the Greatness of the *Happiness* it was designed for. We can never know what the Loss of the Soul is, till we know what the Loss of Heaven is, which is as inconceivably great as its Blessedness. A faint Idea of which may be formed, by considering it will arise, from the Perfection of our Natures in all their natural and moral Capacities, and the Perfection of our Enjoyments both in Kind and Degree, in the Favour and Presence of the ever

bleſſed God. And what an exhaustleſs Fund of Felicity is comprehended in this Thought! But all is loſt, for ever loſt, to the Soul that *lives without God in the World*, and goes out of it eſtranged from him. If we loſe our Souls we loſe Heaven, and all our Peace and Happineſs for ever. And is it not Pity our Souls ſhould loſe ſo great a Happineſs, which was originally deſigned for them?

(4.) The Loſs of the Soul *involves every kind of Loſs and Miſery in it.* In this World, the Miſeries and Miſfortunes which are often very grievous and afflicting, affect us only in a ſingle Point. We loſe our Eſtate perhaps, but preſerve our Health; or if we loſe this alſo, many valuable Friendſhips, and the compaſſionate Care of our Relations, afford us Conſolation in the miſt of bodily Pains and Diſtreſſes; or if our Friends alſo forſake us (as its too common for them to do, when we can only repay their Friendſhip with Gratitude) ſtill we may take Refuge in God, a never-failing and all-ſufficient Friend; and if our Truſt in him be fixed on its juſt Foundation, a Reverence for his Commands, and a Submiſſion to his Will, we may ſtand unſhaken, be our outward Circumſtances ever ſo wretched or forlorn. — But this great Loſs I am now conſidering, leaves us abſolutely deſtitute in the miſt of all-ſurrounding Calamities; deſtitute, I ſay, even of ſo much as one Glimpſe of Light to cheer us in the Darkneſs of Hell, or one Beam of Hope to flatter us with a Deliverance for ever.

(Laſtly.)

(*Lastly.*) If we consider the *Disproportion* between the Soul and that which we receive in *Exchange for it*, we shall be sensible how great a Loss we sustain thereby. How justly does it demand the Astonishment of all the World, to observe at how poor a Price Men generally part with their Souls ! Is it for something considerable, or nearly equivalent ? for any great or generous Ends ; to save their Family, their Friends, or their Country ? or from some noble Principle ; to purchase Reputation and Renown ? no ; its commonly for Things mean, or vile and contemptible. It is for Trash and Trifles, for gilded Toys, and empty Shadows ; to please an idle Fancy, or gratify a sordid Lust ; to gain that which *eats like a Canker* all the Comforts of Life, and destroys like an Infection all the Hopes and Joys of Posterity : It is for *Wealth* gotten by a lying Tongue ; or for *Gratifications* that ruin a Man's Constitution, waste his Estate, and impoverish his Family ; or for *Honour* and *Power*, neither well deserved, nor well employed ; nay, it is often to gratify Pride, Envy, Revenge, or some other hateful and diabolical Passion. In short, it is seldom for that which a wise Man would think worthy his Pursuit.

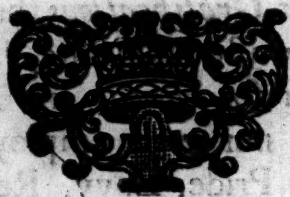
And for these Things a SOUL is lost. —
That which costs wise and good Men the Care and Labour of their Lives ; which employs their serious Hours, and sacred Time, engages their Thoughts, excites their Watchfulness, calls them to their Closets and their Knees, and ob-

24 *Of the Worth of the Soul, &c. Sermon I.*

liges them to pour out their Petitions, Complaints, and importunate Supplications before God; *that for which they take up their Cross, and pass through many painful Exercises, and severe Trials; — that the unthinking Generality lose and throw away, to their everlasting Ignominy and Reproach for the Lusts of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life! —* O, what a Loss is here! and what Madness is this! Which fitly introduces the next general Head,

(V.) To expose the Folly of hazarding the Loss of our Souls on any Consideration whatever.

But this must be the Subject of the ensuing Discourse.



S E R M O N



S E R M O N II.

Of the WORTH of the SOUL, and the
FOLLY of losing it.



M A R K viii. 36, 37,

*For what shall it profit a Man, if he
shall gain the whole World, and lose
his own Soul? Or what shall a Man
give in Exchange for his Soul?*

IN my former Discourse on these Words,
you may remember it was proposed,

- (I.) To enquire what the Soul is.
- (II.) What is meant by losing the Soul.
- (III.) How this Loss is generally occasioned.
- (IV.) To represent the Greatness of the Loss.
- (V.) To expose the Folly of hazarding the
Loss of the Soul on any Consideration what-
ever.
- (VI.) To enquire how this Loss may be pre-
vented.

And

And (*Lastly,*) To make a proper Application of the Subject.

The four first of these have been already considered. I now proceed to the

(Vth.) To expose the Folly of hazarding the Loss of the Soul on any Consideration whatever.

And how surprizing is it to observe Men, who shew no Want of Judgment, or Weakness of Understanding in any other Case, discover so much of it in this ! They are short-sighted in nothing but the Matters of Religion, are prudent enough to foresee any other Evil, but the Loss of their Souls. In their worldly Concerns they will be put off with no Disguises or false Appearances ; will admit of no superficial Answers, or mere Excuses. Talk with them about Learning, or Property, or Government, and you find them Masters of the Subject, and that their Discourse is both instructive and entertaining. Nay, consult them in Cases of Intricacy and Delicacy, how to secure your Estate in Times of publick Commotions, or emerge out of a Sea of overwhelming Distress, and you discover them to be Persons of great Sagacity and Resolution. But talk with them about Religion, and the State of their Souls, advise them to prepare for Death, and run no everlasting Hazards, and you strike them dumb ; they are all Silence and Reserve, either say nothing at all, or something that apparently betrays their Ignorance or Unbelief.

Now

Now what sober Christian can behold such a Scene as this, without secret Grief and Astonishment ! How does it imbitter and inflame ones Spirit against Sin and the World, to see them deceive and destroy such amiable and excellent Souls as these ! “ Lord ! (one is ready to say) “ Why hast Thou given to Men Understanding “ and Foresight ? why hast Thou *caused the* “ *Light of thy Glory in the Face of Christ to* “ *shine upon them ?* To what Purpose is the “ Gospel dispensed ; or with what Propriety “ called the *Ministration of Life and Righte-* “ *ousness ?* It is so far from producing the di- “ vine Effects reasonably expected from it, that “ in many Instances it don’t so much as shew “ Men the Nature and Worth of their Souls ; “ it don’t enrich their Minds with one Grain “ of heavenly Wisdom ; it don’t remove their “ Eyes from Vanity, or their Hearts from the “ Pursuit of Shadows ; tho’ it proposes Honours “ infinitely preferable to Crowns and Scep- “ ters !

Now the Folly of such a Conduct may be thought to appear with sufficient Evidence, from what hath been already said concerning the *Nature of the Soul*, and the *Greatness of its Loss*. A Thing so valuable to be irretrievably and eternally lost, and thrown away upon Trifles, must be esteemed the *Essence of Folly* indeed ! But as this Folly is so fatal, and at the same Time so common, it cannot be shown in too striking a Light, or exposed in too great a Variety of Views. — And therefore,

(1.) Let it be considered that we are under no *Necessity* of losing our Souls.

Great as the Loss of the Soul is, it may be prevented. If it is lost, it is wilfully lost. It is our own voluntary and deliberate Act and Deed, and the Ruin of it can be charged no where but upon ourselves.

If it be imagined that any are shut up under an absolute Impossibility of being saved, and by an eternal irreverfible Decree, bound over to final Ruin, all fuch Thoughts ought immediately to be rejected and detefted as the false and mifchievous Suggestions of Satan, defigned to discourage all Attempts for the Salvation of the Soul. The Doctrine of irrefiftible Fate determining all human Affairs and Events, fo as to render ordinary Means and Endeavours ufelefs, involves in it fuch Absurdity and Contradiction, fuch an Imputation on God, and Reproach on the human Nature, as at once ruins its Credit, and demonstrates the Impossibility of its being true. No, let us abhor every Infination of this Kind, as dangerous and diabolical, and be firmly affured that our Souls may be faved; and if they perifh, it will be our own Fault, and ours only.

I don't fay there is no Danger of lofing them; I know there is a great deal of Danger of it. The Snares of the World are many; the Devices of Satan crafty; our own Hearts deceitful; our Appetites, Paflions, and Propenfions irregular; bad Examples enfnaring; and every Man hath his *own Sin* which moft *eafily* befets

besets him, from whence there always arises imminent Danger to the Soul. — But still our Ruin is not unavoidable. Temptations may be opposed and overcome, sinful Inclinations repelled and subdued. We may withhold our Consent; and if we be not the *willing Servants of Sin*, it shall not lord it over us.

(2.) Let it be farther considered, that we may ordinarily have all the desirable Enjoyments of this World, without losing our Souls.

Religion lays us under no unreasonable Restraints. Our Passions are a useful Part of our Constitution, as well as our Judgment; nor need any Thing which is of Nature's Planting be wholly rooted out. Let us be continent and moderate, maintain a becoming Dominion over ourselves, judge of Things according to their Worth, take nothing but what God gives us, and use every Thing as he directs, and we may enjoy sensible Objects with great Freedom and Chearfulness. It is a Fault as well to be over-scrupulous as intemperate. A sober, discreet Use of this World (which is the most elegant as well as the most innocent) is granted us by the Christian Charter, which allows us to *use the World*, tho' not to *abuse it*.

Men say they want to *enjoy* Life, and mean to possess themselves of the good Things it abounds with. But they call that Enjoyment, which a wise Man counts Distraction. Nature's Appetites, tho' lively, are reasonable and soon satisfied, yet *They* won't be content till they strain and nauseate them, till they load and over-

overcharge them. The Pretensions of a Voluptuary and a Miser to the Enjoyment of Life, are vastly different, but equally unnatural, and give us a melancholly View of the woeful Corruption of human Nature, and the sad State of such as are given up either to an extravagant, or a sordid Temper.

So that if the Welfare of the Soul was not to be consulted, or in the present Case to govern us, (as to be sure in every Case it should) yet the Advantage as to the true Enjoyment of Life is evidently on the Side of Temperance; by how much better it is to eat and drink to Refreshment and Chearfulness, than to Excess and Drunkenness.

(3.) What amazing Folly is it to ruin our Souls, when under the Gospel Dispensation we are provided with such abundant Means and Advantages for saving them!

The Gospel of Christ brings *Life and Immortality to Light (a)*: and contains the clearest Discoveries of the Way of Truth and Happiness: To which those of former Dispensations were as inferior as the Rays of the Morning Dawn are to those of the Noon-day Sun. When Christ was on Earth, *he spake as never Man spake (b)*. His Doctrine fell as the Rain, and distill'd as the Dew. And when it was followed and confirmed by his Death, Resurrection and Ascension, the Preaching of his Apostles, and the Descent of his Spirit, it had the most surprizing Effects on the Hearts and Beha-

(a) 2 Tim. i. 10.

(b) John vii. 46.

Behaviour of Men. And by this Day-spring from on high, may we all be guided into the Paths of Peace : Under this merciful Dispensation may we secure our eternal Interests, if we receive *Christ Jesus the Lord (c)*, if we give earnest Heed to the Things spoken to us in the Gospel *(d)*, and ask and rely on the Aids and Assistance of that Spirit who is dispensed with it.

Salvation is not indeed of ourselves : It is of God's contriving, and of Christ's procuring. We are saved *by the washing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (e)*. But it is freely given us of God, and if we humbly apply to our spiritual Physician, he will heal our Souls, and take away our Sin, that we shall not die.

(4.) The Folly of losing our Souls appears from the Weakness of those Pretences by which Sin and Satan seek to beguile and ruin them.

With what Falshood and Flattery do they address our Hearts, solicit Admittance, and seek an Ascendancy there ! These Disturbers of our Peace, and Destroyers of our Souls, have not one solid Argument by which to prove or enforce their Claim. Conscious of this, they attempt to draw a Veil over the Understanding, and make their Entrance by the Passions ; deceiving us first, and then mocking our Weakness. But here Reason and Experience should discover the Cheat ; and there Wisdom and Resolution defend the Passage to our Hearts.

Does

(c) Col. ii. 6. (d) Heb. ii. 1. (e) Tit. iii. 5.

Does Sin court our Approbation with the Charms of Beauty, or entice us with the Arts of Language, or the Ornaments of Dress? This is too thin a Disguise. We must have lived to little Purpose indeed, and have gained nothing by our Experience, if we incline to its Ways by fair Speech, and the Flattery of the Lips; if we can look no farther than the outside Appearance, and are still to be captivated with Paint and Colouring.

Does it plead Custom and common Example? — That is not our Rule, nor will be our Defence; good Examples should be imitated, because they are justified of Wisdom, but bad ones bravely and resolutely opposed, because they are the Offspring of Folly. No Names or Numbers can vindicate Madness, and a Violation of all the Maxims of prudent and reasonable Conduct.

Does it court you with the Offers of Pleasure? — Consider whether any Thing be worthy the Name of Pleasure, which is not innocent and manly; or He worthy the Name of a rational Agent, who ventures upon a transient and momentary Gratification, that will be followed with a Sting and a Curse, sure, and deep, and lasting.

Is worldly Gain and Profit the Pretence? — Alas! the Wealth of the World will not purchase the Peace of the Soul; much less recompence the Loss of it. This our Saviour plainly asserts in the Text; and this Satan impudently contradicts, by offering to Men a trifling, in-
con

considerable Part of it, as a fair Equivalent for their Souls: and so weak and sordid are Men, so intoxicated with the Love of a deceitful World, that in this Offer he is too often successful.

Is Secrecy the Decoy, or the Purpose of future Repentance and Amendment? — These are the vainest Pretences of all. As to the first, — Does Secrecy alter the Nature of Actions? Can the Curtains of Midnight conceal us from the Eye of Heaven, or the Witness of Conscience? — And as to the latter; It is a likely Thing indeed, that a Continuance in Sin should be the Way to Repentance! As well might the Deceiver say, that Sloth and Extravagance are the Way to Riches, or Intemperance and Excess to Health and Fame. — But is there a Soul in all the World mean enough to bear such an Insult on its Understanding? or weak enough to be duped by so wretched a Suggestion as this? to deliberate upon it, and at length be persuaded? Why then it is fallen indeed! fallen into a Stupidity more than brutal! for the least Spark of manly Wisdom would teach it immediately to reject the senseless Insinuation with the Contempt and Indignation it deserves. — But,

(5.) That which aggravates their Folly to a surprizing Degree is, that Men will tamely suffer a Cheat to be put upon them, by which Thousands of Souls are apparently deluded and ruined before their Eyes.

D

How

How strange is it, that Men will take Warning and Advantage by the Experience of others, except in the Affairs of their Souls ! If I were told by experienced Travellers, that such a Road was infested with Thieves and Murderers ; or my Friends should assure me, that the Cup I was about to drink was poisoned, and would be fatal to me ; I should be highly worthy of Blame if I did not believe them. But if I had seen these Things with my own Eyes, and yet ventured on my Ruin ; who would find in his Heart to bestow upon me either a Sigh or a Tear ? All the World would say, I was a stubborn, self-will'd, abandon'd Creature, bent on my own Destruction. — Well Sirs, and has no Body ever inform'd us that the Devil is a Murderer of Souls ? that this World is the great Engine of his Destruction, full of Arts and Objects suited and intended to effect it ? that the pleasing Draughts of Sin are a deadly Poison ? Say, is this a Secret ? Did you never hear it till now ? — Nay, have you not seen, have you not known, *that she hath cast down many wounded, and that many strong Men have been slain by her, that her House is the Way to Hell, going down to the Chambers of Death ?* And what ! will you with open Eyes rush on to the same Destruction ? will you take the poisonous Cup into your Hand, of which Thousands are dying around you ? And freely receive the venomous Beast into your Bosom, which has stung so many of thy Acquaintance and Companions

to

to Death? O Infatuation and Sottishness never to be equal'd! But,

(*Lastly,*) Nothing shows the Folly of wilfully destroying our Souls in a more glaring Light, than considering how it will appear hereafter; viz. at Death and Judgment. At Death, when this World shall be over, and you are entering on a World that will never end, what will you think of yourself, for bestowing all your Care on a poor perishing Body, and none on your never-dying Soul? Will Things appear *then*, in the same Light they do now? No, e'er the Eyes of the Body are closed, those of the Mind will be opened; and your present Folly set before you in the most tremendous Light.—

“Men may live Fools, but Fools they cannot die.” Again,

How shall we account for this Conduct at the Day of Judgment? that great Day of Recollection and Retribution! Wilt thou not start and tremble, and be covered with inexpressible Confusion, when God shall open the Volumes of Time, turn to thy Name in them, and read over the Records of thine Ignorance and Sloth, thy Carelessness and Delays, thy broken Sabbaths, and broken Vows, thy Sins against him, against thy Neighbour, and thy Soul! tell thee when and where thou didst most shamefully trifle with and contemn him, listen to wicked Spirits, and wicked Men, and catch greedily at the Bait laid for thee, and run like a Bird into the Fowler's Snare, in Spite of Warnings, Intreaties, and Rebukes! And now that Soul

36 *Of the Worth of the Soul, Sermon II.*
that should have been thy Care is perishing, and
the God who made thee will have no Mercy on
thee, and he who formed thee will shew thee no
Favour (g).

Thus have I endeavoured in various Views
to represent and expose the egregious Folly of
hazarding the Loss of the Soul. — I proceed
to the last Thing proposed, a Concern of the
utmost Importance, and that is,

(VI.) To consider how the Loss of the Soul
may be prevented.

(1.) The first Thing necessary to prevent this
Loss, is serious *Thought* and *Consideration*.

Advice frequently given us in Scripture,
*O that they were wise, that they understood
this, that they would consider their latter
End!* Deut. xxxii. 29. *My People doth not
consider,* Isa. i. 3. *Consider this ye that forget
God,* Psalm l. 22. and yet what Men who are
immers'd in the Cares and Concerns of the pre-
sent Life, appear extremely averse to take, and
are studious of every Pretence to excuse them-
selves from taking. *They can't consider.* But
they actually do consider, or else they would
not have so many Excuses ready to offer against
Consideration; and why can't they consider of
their Souls? *They want Time.* This is a meer
Pretence; they find Time enough for less im-
portant Concerns; Time enough to employ in
their worldly Affairs; nay, to lavish upon Va-
nity, and Sin, and Trifles: In truth, they waste
their Time, and then complain they want it.

But

(g) Isa. xxvii. 11.

But if they were ingenuous, they ought rather to confess they want Inclination. — Again, *its soon enough*, some imagine, *to consider upon such Subjects*. Is it ever then too soon to be good and happy? too soon to flee from Hell and make sure of Heaven? too soon to prevent the Loss of an immortal Soul? If you think it too soon to consider now, you are likely e'er long to find it too late! *But they don't observe others are so thoughtful and considerate*. I answer, wise and good Men are; and what if you were to be better than your Neighbours? shall you repent of this hereafter? *But I know not what to fix my Thoughts upon; I want proper Subjects for Consideration*. Then I am now ready to furnish you with them.

Think *what your Soul is*.

How lovely, how noble, how excellent a Creature! a Spirit allied to its Maker, his Offspring and Image; like him in his Powers and Immortality; capable of his Love and Glory, of present Friendship with him, and of his perpetual Enjoyment.

If it be said, “Do not the Faculties of the Soul appear very sensibly to decay with those of the Body?” I answer; they do. But this proves nothing to the Disadvantage of the Soul, either in point of Excellency or Duration; we must not be too forward to judge by *Appearances* only; they often deceive us, and abuse our Understanding. In many Cases we can see no farther than the Surface of Things; and have nothing to correct the De-

ception of our Senses; but in regard to our Souls, and their eternal Concerns, we have surer Evidence to govern us, and have no Reason to trust to the Testimony of Sense only. The Soul appears indeed to be enfeebled in its Operations in Proportion to the Degree in which the Vigour of the Animal Frame decreases; but it does not necessarily follow that this is owing to any real Decay of its original Powers. It possibly may and very probably is owing chiefly, if not entirely, to the Impediment or Restraint those Powers are laid under by the Weakness or Disorder of the bodily Organs, by which they are wont to exert and shew themselves. The Defect is not in the Agent, but the Instrument. So that when the Soul is free from this Impediment, it will exert itself again with all its native Vigour; and evince that its original Powers and Faculties remain'd all the while undiminished and unimpaired, and as to their innate Vigour and Excellence, independant on those of the Body.

Consider then how excellent a Creature thine Immortal Soul is; and whether thou canst offer a greater Indignity to it, than to bind it down to Earth, when it aspires after Heaven; to prostitute it to brutish Lusts and diabolical Passions, when it is capable of the most exalted Exercises, and divine Entertainments! This is to enslave it here and for ever. Again,

Consider seriously *what a kind of World you live in.*

To

To see how it is coveted, priz'd, and pursued by most, one would take it for a happy one indeed ; that every Part of it was a Paradise, and every Portion of it a Treasure. But make a just Estimate of earthly Things before you set your Heart upon them, and impartially consider their Insufficiency and Uncertainty.

In framing this Estimate, let us allow every Advantage that can be reasonably asked ; and more than was ever found : let us suppose they do afford a very considerable present Satisfaction, that this Satisfaction is uninterrupted, and mingled with no Alloy, and that we could retain our Relish of them to the utmost Period of Life. Now the Question is not whether such Enjoyments are desirable in themselves, or duly considered ; but whether they are a fit Price for a Soul, or if it be worth our while to sacrifice our Souls for the Sake of them. And surely in this View they will appear of a very insignificant Value ; especially if we recollect what hath been already said concerning the Nature, Capacities, Dignity, and Duration of the Soul.

But these Things are not only insufficient at best, but very uncertain. Were they ever so satisfying, there is no depending on them. Our sweetest Comforts are often suddenly imbittered ; our dearest Blessings snatch'd from our Arms, or struck dead at our Feet. The Eye that sparkles with Joy to Day, to-morrow is obscured with Tears. --- And is such a World a

fit Object to engross our Hearts, and for which we should exchange our Souls! Further,

Consider *what the other World is*; and let your Thoughts run freely on Futurity.

Don't imagine that Things are less real or important, because they are future; which would involve this Absurdity in it, that every thing present is most important.

Tho' you are not yet entered on an everlasting State of Existence, will you therefore be unconcerned about it? Was not your Existence at this Instant a Week ago an Object of Futurity? But was it therefore at that Time of little Importance to you, whether you were now happy or miserable? You are concerned for *present* Happiness; for that very Reason you should look forward; for will not that which is future soon be present? You do look forward to provide for future Happiness and against future Misery in this World, and why do you not look forward beyond it? Why are you unconcerned about Happiness or Misery, never ending Happiness or Misery in the other World?

Have you not some Time since buried a Friend, with whom you once enjoyed sweet and intimate Conversation? And was not his Removal into the other World as much an Object of Futurity then, as yours is now? And could you ask him whether therefore it was or ought to have been esteem'd a Matter of light Concern in the Days of your Acquaintance on Earth, What would he answer? — Well, you are travelling the same Road, are soon to make

make the same awful Experiment he hath made already, to take your everlasting Leave of the present Scene and State of Being, and to launch into Eternity ; and is it possible you should be indifferent about the Event ? God knows, and you yourselves know, you do not use to act thus as to the Events of Time, uncertain Time ! and yet more uncertain Events ! And how can you answer it to your own Understanding, or him who gave it you, if you act thus where your Salvation is at Stake, your everlasting Salvation ! Moreover,

Consider *the Shortness of human Life* ; and how little a Time it is e'er you will pass out of one World into another.

Consider this I say, and compare with it the common Practice and Pursuits of Mankind, and it will minister new Occasion for Humiliation and Astonishment. Were Men to live here always, how could they pursue the World, and seek Possessions in it with more Ardour than the Generality of them do ? Indeed if a Man maintains a constant Regard to God, makes Religion his first Choice, and his Soul his principal Care, he may in Subordination to these, acquire and enjoy the good Things of Life with Cheerfulness and Delight. But for a Man to grasp this World as if it were his All, when the best of it is little more than *Vanity* mix'd with *Vexation* ; to be eagerly anxious for the Possessions of it, as if they were substantial and permanent, when we know not but we may be dispossessed to-morrow ; to bestow all our Care
and

and Pains upon temporary Things, and none upon eternal ones, when we are within a few Weeks or Days perhaps of passing out of Time into Eternity ; this is consummate Weakness, folly that wants a Name, and that cannot be parallel'd by any other we observe in the World. And what can it be ascribed to but want of CONSIDERATION ? or to Men's not considering seriously and truly what this World is they live in, what *that* is they are going to, and how very soon they must pass out of one into the other ?

Once more, Consider *the Beauty and Excellency of true Religion.*

How lovely, how reasonable a Thing ! lovely in itself, and reasonable in its Demands ! Offering no Violence to the Understanding ; making no exorbitant Claims on our Thoughts and Time ; laying us under no hard Contributions or insupportable Restraints. That which some weak or crafty Men call Religion, or which Hypocrites use as a Cloak or Mask to cover ill Designs, and at which Libertines laugh, and from whence they take Occasion to decry and disclaim all Religion, I will not undertake to defend. But by Religion I mean an inward Sense of God, and a governing Regard to him in all we think and act, as our Lord and Portion ; or an inward Principle and Determination of Mind to please Him, and approve ourselves to him in the whole Conduct of Life.

And against this Regard to the divine Authority and Laws, what can be objected ? Is it
not

not reasonable, manly, and judicious? Is there any Thing mean or low in such a reverential Fear of our Maker? — If you say, will it not damp our Joys, rob us of our Spirit, and make us dull and melancholy? I answer, quite the contrary. It will diffuse Ease, Contentment, and Chearfulness throughout your whole Frame, and to the End of Life, It will enliven and exhilarate you, and be like a reviving Cordial, or the Blood that passes through the Heart, to invigorate the languishing State of Nature. Such a lively and operative Principle as this, will feed and cherish every pious and virtuous Habit, suppress or oppose every vicious and corrupt one, and assimilate every Thing unto itself, till by Degrees it makes the whole religious Practice both easy and delightful. And would not such a frequent View of real Religion be a great Incentive to the Practice of it? And is it not of the highest Importance, thus to adjust our Sentiments about it? to strip it of all its Disguise, and survey it in its native Simplicity and Glory?

(Finally,) Think, and very seriously think, of the Misery of those who live and die negligent of their Souls, and their eternal Interests.

This is a Course which few will take upon them to justify, tho' it is what many are betrayed into by the Force of Temptation and evil Example. Carelessness, Pleasure, sensual Gratification, and the Solicitations of the World draw them into, and detain them in this shameful Course, till Death and Eternity surprize them;

them ; and then *they* mourn at the last, when *their Body and their Flesh are consumed, and say, How have we bated Instruction, and our Hearts despised Reproof (b) !*

Well, but should we not ponder so awful an Event in our Hearts ? should we not expostulate with ourselves upon it ? Is it not an Absurdity even to Madness ? Is there any Calamity that can be compared with it, or to be dreaded and avoided like this ? A Fire in our Neighbourhood, the Plague or Pestilence at next Door, the Invasion of an irresistible Enemy, the Bite of a Serpent, torturing Pain, or the Confinement of a Dungeon, have all their Terrors, and any of them may well be supposed to involve us in great Distress ; but the very worst that any of these can do, is only *to kill the Body*, and put an untimely End to that Life, which according to the Course of Nature could not last long ; and what then are these to the Loss of the Soul ! to the bitter Fruits and fatal Consequences of Sin ! to devouring Fire and everlasting Burnings ! to Despair and Anguish, intolerable and everlasting ! to *weeping, wailing, and gnashing of Teeth, where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched (i) !* Yet this is the Lot of lost Souls, and the *Portion of their Cup !*

And do not these Things now deserve to be seriously pondered ? Can proper Subjects of Meditation be wanting, when such important ones lie so plain before us ? And a frequent, fix'd, and

(b) Prov. v. 11, 12.

(i) Mark ix. 44.

Serm. II. *and the Folly of losing it.* 45

and devout Consideration of which, may by the Blessing of God, be a Means of preventing the Loss of our immortal Souls. In order whereunto this is the first Thing necessary. I now add,

(2.) Frequent those Places where you enjoy the proper Means to promote the Interest and Salvation of your Souls.

But the consideration of this and the remaining Directions, together with the Application of the Subject must be reserved for the ensuing Discourse.

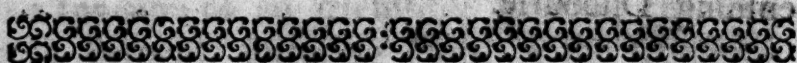


S E R M O N



S E R M O N III.

Of the WORTH of the SOUL, and the
FOLLY of losing it.



M A R K viii. 36, 37.

*For what shall it profit a Man, if he
shall gain the whole World, and lose
his own Soul? Or what shall a Man
give in Exchange for his Soul?*

I N treating these Words it was proposed

- (I.) To enquire what the Soul is.
- (II.) What we are to understand by the
Loss of the Soul.
- (III.) How the Loss of it is commonly oc-
casioned.
- (IV.) To Represent the Greatness of this
Loss.
- (V.) To shew the Folly of hazarding the
Loss of the Soul on any Consideration.
- (VI.) To

(VI.) To enquire how the Loss of it may be prevented.

(Lastly,) To apply the Subject.

Five of these Heads have been already fully considered, and in my last Discourse I entered

(VI.) On the enquiry how the Loss of the Soul may be prevented. — And the first Thing I mentioned as necessary hereunto was

(1.) Serious Consideration.

I proceed now to some further Directions.

(2.) Frequent those Places where you enjoy the proper Means to promote the Interest and Salvation of your Souls.

I mean worshipping Assemblies on the Lord's Day, and your own Closets every Day. And that not as a Talk and a Burden, but from a rational Judgment and a deliberate Choice. Make Conscience of Retirement, use yourselves to Reading, Meditation and Prayer; and be constant, and exemplary in the House of God; where it is your Duty, and Wisdom, your Interest, and Honour to be found; where you may hear *Words by which you may be saved*; where Addresses are made to Heaven publicly and solemnly, and divine Messages of Mercy are brought from thence to the Sons of Men, and where such Transactions pass between God and the upright Soul as are infinitely important and infinitely beneficial.

If any call this Superstition, and jeer at you for it; tell them their Raillery is ill placed, and admonish them not to use their Wit on
such

such serious Subjects. Acquaint them you attend religious Assemblies to do Honour to the supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth, to testify your Love to your great Redeemer, and your Belief of his Religion, to obtain the Fruits of his Death, to be instructed and quickened in the Path of Duty, and in the Way of Life; to keep Conscience awake and watchful, to be armed against Temptations, and to promote and strengthen the Habits of divine Grace and Virtue in your Soul. And let them see that you wear your Religion not as a Dress for Shew or Disguise, but as a governing Principle and Rule of Action, and that you are daily aiming to be more steady to your Principle, and more conformable to your Rule. Let them see that the Exercises of Religion are no Ways inconsistent with, but highly conducive to the due Discharge of your Duty in every Station and Relation of Life, and that they are the Stay and Anchor of your Souls under all the Difficulties and Discouragements of it.

(3.) Bring your Souls to *Jesus Christ*.

I mean transact the great Affair of your eternal Salvation, with the blessed God thro' his Mediation. Remember and consider that *he is the Way the Truth and the Life, and no Man cometh to the Father but by him (a)*. He is the great Lover and Friend of Souls. and God esteems him highly for *his Work's sake*. And having set him forth as a Propitiation,

(a) John xiv. 6.

tiation, hath testify'd to the truth of his Doctrine and efficacy of his Death, by *declaring him to be his Son with Power* in his Resurrection from the Dead (f).

Therefore believe, and obey him; make use of the Remedy provided and offered in his Gospel, through the Grace of God; be convinced that you are undeserving and impotent Creatures; that no Power or Mercy can save you but his; and that he is able and willing, and appointed of God to this important Office. Be assured that nothing can ruin you in case of your sincere unreserved Compliance with his gracious Terms, and an unshaken Adherence to his Cause and Interest; and having once engaged in his Service, be loyal and faithful to the Death.

For such Creatures as we are to pretend to perfect Innocence, is Madness; to conceal our Guilt or excuse it, is impossible; to make Satisfaction to, or escape from divine Justice, is no more in our Power than to remove Mountains; there is but one way left, (and thank God it is a sure and effectual one!) to come to Christ by Faith and Repentance, and humbly to accept Pardon and Forgiveness at his Hands. — Bring therefore your precious Souls to his Footstool, consider his Merit, and rely upon it; his Authority, and submit to it; his Grace, and glorify it; live not another Hour without embracing him as your atoning Sacrifice, your vital Head, and your governing Lord.

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(f) Rom. i. 4.

(4.) Frequently examine your Hearts and Actions.

Use the Power of Self-reflection, which God hath given you for this excellent Purpose. Converse more with your own Hearts, and cultivate an intimate Acquaintance with yourselves. This is of infinitely greater importance than every other kind of Knowledge.—It is a miserable Thing to be always immers'd in the Business or Amusements of this vain World. For without Retirement and Reflection what can we know of ourselves, or of our State, or of the Foundation we are to stand on, when that of the World shall be shaken and dissolved?

Let us therefore sometimes make a solemn Pause, go out of the Croud of Life, and in a serious Recollection, cause our Actions and Motives to pass before us in review. — ‘What are we doing? How stand our Accounts with God? Are we on good Terms with the Almighty? Do we run no dangerous Risques? Are we upright? Do we go backward or forward in Religion? or are we doubtful of our State and Condition? Is our Behaviour pleasing or displeasing to *our Judge?*’—Whatever be the State of our Souls, such serious Self-reflections are highly proper and needful.—But to bring this Matter to a Point.

(5.) Labour after the habitual Love of God. To that End, often contemplate his infinite and adorable Excellencies; behold him on his Throne of Glory, shining with equal Majesty and Love; consider the Millions of Creatures whose

whose Eyes wait on him, and whose Hearts are gladen'd with his Presence; recount his Favours to your friends, your families, yourselves; and especially recollect what he hath done for your Souls; think of him as your Parent, Friend, Benefactor, and Lord; who possesses all the Tenderness, Fidelity, and Wisdom, which render those Relations most excellent and endearing.

Above all, view the infinite and eternal God in *Christ Jesus* his Son, *reconciling this apostate World unto himself.* Behold him as the God of Grace and Peace; offering Forgiveness, and eternal Life; continuing and repeating this Offer; urging your Acceptance of it as unwilling to take a Denial; and reminding you of the emptiness of the World, which witholds your Consent, and engrosses your Esteem. Think of the incomprehensible Felicity of his Favour; ponder every Motive and Argument that may dispose and attract you into this divine Affection; and finally, pray with ardent Importunity, that *the Lord would direct your Hearts into the Love of God, (g)* and into that Holiness which will prepare you for the immediate Sight, and the everlasting Enjoyment of Him.

I proceed now to apply the Subject, And,

(1.) From what hath been said let us learn the true Value of the Soul.

You have seen the Excellency of its Nature, its miserable Condition if it be lost, and the Danger of losing it. And to know its Value

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is the first Step towards saving it. Our Fear of losing it, and Care to prevent its Loss will be proportionable to the Apprehensions we have of its Value. We can never therefore lay the infinite worth of the Soul too near our Heart, or imprint it too deeply on our Mind, in as much as the Loss of it can never be repaired. *What shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?* Will he give back the whole World again, which he is supposed to have gained by the Loss, or received as the Price of his Soul? That he would gladly do, but no such Re-exchange can be made. For were a Man to gain the whole World at the Expence of his Soul, he could not regain his Soul, were he ever so willing, by paying back the Price of the whole World. How sadly then is the Soul undervalued, when it is so often parted with for a small Portion, nay for only the doubtful Chance of a small Portion of it!

It was from a deep Sense of the infinite Folly of Mankind in thus prostituting and ruining their Souls, that our condescending Saviour here so graciously reminds us of their Value; and out of the greatness of his Compassion endeavours to prevent the Loss of them, by exciting us to consider it. And surely none better knew the Worth of Souls than he who actually sacrificed his own Life to save them! But yet how little Impression does his Judgment make on the generality of Men, who are for saving every thing but their Souls, who seem to think no Time so ill spent as that which

which is laid out for this Purpose! who esteem it lost Time, and could be willing enough to save their Souls if it might be done upon easier Terms. Whence can this arise, but from the grossest inattention to the Value of the Soul?

(2.) We may hence learn to make a right Estimate of the World.

In our Saviour's Account you see all the Possessions of it are not worth a single Soul. And therefore it were greater Wisdom for a Man to seek the Salvation of his Soul, than to gain the universal Empire of the World, upon the Supposition that both were equally attainable.

This World indeed is the work of God; and as such it is *good*, suitable to the End for which it was made; and the Enjoyments and Possessions of it considered as the Effects of his Bounty may be desired in a reasonable Manner, and used for such Purposes as he intended them to serve. And when our Saviour speaks so diminutively of the World, as he does in the Expostulation before us, it is only in Comparison with what is so much more noble and excellent, *viz.* the Soul that is often injured, deceived, and ruined by it. Take the World as God gives it, and use and enjoy it as he allows, and all is well. But if it be given *in Exchange for the Soul*, if it be thought a valuable Consideration for our present Peace and future Happiness, this is a gross Mistake and most shameful delusion.

And it is highly fit we should be frequently put in Mind of the perishing Nature and uncer-

tain Continuance of worldly Goods, because they are apt to strike too strongly on our Senses, deceive us by their flattering Appearance, and create in us a Passion for them much too intense and violent. And though Men know they can no more extract a real Happiness from them than they can extract Gold out of a Rock, yet will they rack and torture them for this very Purpose, as if the Experiment had never been made.

Now to curb and cure this Passion, does the sacred Volume depreciate the World, obscure its Splendor, and expose it's Flattery and Falshood; representing the best Appearance of it as mean and contemptible, and the very best State of Man in it as a Dream and Vision of the Night; telling us, that *every Man walketh in a vain Shew, disquieteth himself in vain, (b) and in his best Estate is altogether Vanity; (i)* the Reason is, he overvalues the Blessings of this World, and himself on Account of them, expects more Satisfaction in them than they are able to bestow; and thus is as vainly employed as if he took Pains to give Language to a Picture, or Motion to a Statue.

(3.) What hath been observed on this Subject intirely overthrows the Notion of the Soul's Annihilation or utter Extinction at Death.

I confess the Appearance of a Corps is a very melancholy and mortifying Sight. To see a Face which a little before blessed us with

Smiles,

(b) Psalm xxxix. 6. (i) Psalm xxxix. 5.

Smiles, now covered with Paleness, all ghastly and horrid! the lovely Eye sunk and sightless! the Mouth which a few Days ago opened with Wisdom and Authority, now closed in Silence! with the last parting Pang perhaps still visibly impress'd on the Countenance! very affecting all this, no doubt; and casts a sad Heaviness and Gloom on the human Heart. And had we nothing but *Sense* to direct and cheer us, might fill us with Doubts and Anxiety about a State of future Existence. But to a Man who is only guided by the dim rays of *Reason*, even without the Help of Revelation, the Contrary is sufficiently manifest. One who attends to the Powers and Capacities of his Soul, it's evident Tendency towards Perfection, and the great Degree of it actually attained by some in this Life; One who considers and reflects, who reasons and discourses, and who finds beyond all Contradiction an Understanding, and Conscience in himself, (neither of which are the Properties of Matter, after all the possible Modifications and Refinements it is capable of) such a one, I say, plainly perceives that Body and Spirit are essentially different, and that in all Reason the *latter* must be supposed to exist after the Dissolution of the *former*.

But if the Death of the Soul were not a most unphilosophical Notion, yet is it a most irreligious one. If it did not contradict the Reason of Man, yet is it the highest Reflection on the Wisdom and Goodness of God. What! God create Man with the Idea, Capa-

city, and Hope of Immortality, and yet extinguish his Being in a few Years! make him a little lower than an Angel; and then lay him level with a Brute! dignify him with intellectual Powers, and then reduce him to Dust and Darkness! inspire him with a living Soul, capable of an endless Life, and then presently reduce that Soul to nothing! This is so plainly contrary to divine Wisdom, that it can never be supposed. It is something too mean and fickle and vain to be ascribed to him who is *wise in Heart, wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in working.* The very Imagination sinks the whole present State of things relating to Mankind into mere Burlesque and Pageantry; and with a strong and sad Propriety extorts from the Heart of every considerate Man that sore Complaint, *Wherefore hast thou made all Men in vain!*

Suppose a State of future Existence, and the present World, to be one of Service and Tryal, in order to Perfection and Happiness in another, and every thing is consistent and harmonious; then Education, Learning, Self-government, conscientious Behaviour, and a religious Love and Fear of God, are all right and fit, wise and profitable. But upon the annihilating Scheme, which supposes that when we dye we cease to Be, Life and this World are not worth a Thought; the Pains we take with ourselves and others is fruitless Labour; no Motive appears to induce us either to the Love or Fear of God; they who live in the
worst

worst and most dissolute Manner, and they who are most inoffensive and useful, fare alike; or rather the best People in the World are most unhappy, as they have no Hope or Prospect of any Recompence for their Self-denial and Sufferings in the Cause of Virtue. And besides all this, the strongest Temptation in the World is perpetually laid before Mankind to question or despise the Existence and Government of God.

If it be said, Absurd as you suppose this Opinion to be, it is maintained by great Numbers at this Day; I shall only answer here, The more is the Pity and the Shame. But I hope such Believers won't reprove a Child or reproach a Servant for any foolish or wicked Behaviour; as nothing *they* do or can do is so ridiculous or extravagant as their Faith; not to say, that all imaginable Sensuality and Folly is the natural Consequence of such corrupt Principles as these.

(4.) We may observe the Compassion of the great Redeemer in the Concern he expresses for the Salvation of Souls.

He knows their Worth, though Men do not; hence the Expostulation in the Text. He saw to what a degree of Shame Mankind had perverted their Way; into what an egregious Mistake they had fallen; for what low and sordid Purposes they lived; and for how small a Part of this World they sacrificed their Souls, and that the Generality of 'em were cheating themselves with the Pursuit of
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airy Vanity: Now this filled his generous Heart with Pity, kindled in it all the tender Sentiments of Compassion and Love, and inspired him with the godlike Resolution to instruct, advise, and warn immortal Beings, to prevent the Damage they were likely to sustain, and to fly from impending Ruin. ' Shall Satan, ' saith he, betray the whole human Race into ' Destruction, through the Inticements of Sin? ' Shall *they* perish remedilessly through Folly ' and Ignorance, uninstructed and unadmo- ' nished? No! I will enlighten their World; ' I will discover their Enemies and Danger; ' I will affect their Hearts and alarm their ' Consciences, and awaken in them that Fear ' and Self-Love which is implanted in their ' Natures for their Safety and Felicity. Nay, ' I will dye for them, and redeem them to ' God by my Blood; I will suffer the Punish- ' ment of Sin for their Sake and in their Stead; ' I will make their Peace, and be their Ran- ' som, and intercede with my Father in their ' Favour; and I will send my Gospel to them, ' and cause the Spirit of Truth and Righteous- ' ness to be dispensed with it. I will put an ' Argument into their Mouths that was never ' used or known before; an Argument as ten- ' der as it is amazing, as powerful and preva- ' lent with God as it will be desirable and de- ' lightful to them; they shall beseech my Fa- ' ther to shew them Mercy by the Sufferings, ' and Intercession of his Son. And thus will ' I cause them to know the Bowels of my
' Com-

‘ Compassion towards them, and teach them
‘ to set a greater Value upon their own preci-
‘ ous and immortal Souls.’

(*Lastly.*) How strange is it that, after such express and solemn Warnings, Men should so generally undervalue their Souls and neglect their everlasting Interest!

Is the Soul so precious a Jewel, and yet sold for every Trifle! bartered for any Lust, either of the Flesh or the Eye! O Sirs, what madmen, what Monsters do a great Part of Mankind transform themselves into! What prodigious Lengths do they run in Folly and Iniquity! and what heavy Vengeance do they draw down upon their own Heads without Pity or Remorse!

Imagine only the Numbers of Souls that are continually sacrificed in all Parts of the World to Ambition, Avarice and Sensuality; then turn your Thoughts to the Multitude that perish through Ignorance, Carelessness and Sloth; then behold the abject dishonourable Generation of Men, who ruin themselves by their Diffimulation, Hypocrisy or Apostacy; then think of those, (and this I own deeply affects and wounds ones Heart) those who are almost persuaded to be Christians, who have many good Qualities, but darken the Lustre of them all, with some criminal Practice or evil Disposition of Heart. Men of Probity and Honour towards their Neighbour, but not sincere with God; just to their Servants, kind to their Children, and it may be generous

generous to both, yet unjust and cruel to their own Souls; and though nigh to the Kingdom of Heaven, yet never likely to enter in. The loose and hardened Crew, who never name their Souls but when they damn them, and never take the awful Name of God into their Mouths but to blaspheme it, these, I say, one passes by, if with some Pity yet not without a great Mixture of Indignation and Contempt; but when modest and good natured Creatures, whose Hearts are benevolent, and Tempers open and friendly, and in whom one sees many Marks of Ingenuity and Generosity and other amiable Qualities, are drawn aside by their own Lusts, are deceived by the Flattery and Falshood of the World or Satan the God of it, and while they are compassionate to others are barbarous to themselves, and cruelly prostitute and endanger their Souls, this is a Sight most grievous and tragical indeed!

And therefore as far as lies in my Power to prevent it, especially with regard to such as have any remaining sparks of Ingenuity and Wisdom, I must beg your Patience while I conclude this Subject with a brief but serious Exhortation to the Care of your Souls. And here you will forgive me if in a Way of friendly Advice and Expostulation some things that have been already touched on in the Illustration of the Subject, should be repeated.

The Salvation of your Souls, Sirs, is of the highest Importance, and therefore is the first and the last Thing to be minded. It can
never

never be chattered upon too soon or persisted in too long, it being the Sum of Wisdom and the Foundation and Safeguard of our Happiness. It ought to be insinuated into our Offspring from their Infancy, inculcated upon them in their Youth, taught them as their grand Maxim and governing Principle, never to be overlook'd or forgotten on any Consideration whatsoever, but carried with them from their Cradle to their Grave. Parents should give it in Charge to their Children early, with the warmest Affection and the most commanding Authority.—‘ My dear Child, take Care of thy

‘ Soul. Mind Religion. Fear God, and keep
‘ his Commandments, what ever you do. I
‘ thank you for your Duty and Affection to
‘ me ; and am glad to observe that you are
‘ tractable, diligent, and promising. But I be-
‘ seech you, *remember your Creator* ; revere
‘ and adore him ; get Wisdom ; and remember
‘ that *the Fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and*
‘ *to depart from Evil that is Understanding.*’

—And how little soever this is their Practice, it is certainly their Duty ; and a Duty which all who have any Interest in the rising Generation or Authority over them, owe to God and to them, whether Masters, Ministers, or Magistrates.

If it be said, ‘ Will this be no Disadvantage to them ? ’ — I answer ; Will a healthy Constitution or a graceful Behaviour be any Disadvantage to them ? Will good Sense and good Manners, Ingenuity or Learning be any dis-

disadvantage to them? no more will Religion. Real genuine Religion adorns and invigorates the Spirit of Man; it is like a lovely Flower in an elegant Garden, which as soon as it opens, entertains you with beautiful Colours and a grateful Odour, but neither cumbers your Ground with Roots, nor shades it with luxuriant Leaves. In short, there is all the Reason in the World for fixing this Principle deep in the Hearts of Men, and not one that can justify the Neglect of it; and it is astonishing that the present Generation should be so inordinately afraid of Enthusiasm, and yet have no watchful Eye against Licentiousness, and Irreligion.

If you say, there are a great many well bred Persons, very entertaining and polite, who yet pay little Regard to such Advice; I answer,—— That may be; but I can never admit this to be a Part of their Accomplishments. I consider it as a Defect and Deformity. They would be quite as fine People and as good Company, if the Care of their Souls was their governing Principle. They would be as agreeable to others in the World, and more happy to themselves in their Retirements; and especially in a Season of Adversity and Affliction, from which Persons of the most exalted Condition, and the most finished Accomplishments have no Exemption that I know of. It would administer Hope and Chearfulness to the Spirit, when it found the Body decaying and dissolving, and itself departing out of it.

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And every just Motive and Principle concurs to enforce this Advice. *Reason* tells us it ought to be taken, when it asserts the Existence of God, the Reality of Providence, and the Certainty of a future State of Recompence. *Conscience* demands it of us, secretly urges to it, and stings us with Reproach for the Neglect of it. — *Wisdom, Interest, and Honour*, dictate the same; and declare there is nothing to be put into the Ballance against the necessary Care of the Soul.—In short, whether they be living Witnesses, or dying Testimonies you consult, All agree in declaring, That the chief Happiness of Man should be the constant Care and aim of his life. And as for divine *Revelation*, it exhorts us to it in one View or another, from the Beginning to the End of it.

And I beseech you, who are they but the Enemies of your Souls who dissuade you from this necessary Care?

Satan, their declared Enemy will undoubtedly attempt it by all imaginable Stratagems; by Flattery and Delusion, the Enchantments of Pleasure, the Tyranny of Custom, the Hopes of Safety, the Dread of Singularity, the Allowances that are to be made for Youth, the little Occasion you have of being serious and godly so soon, the Sowness it will give to your Temper, and the Disadvantage it will be to you in the World. These are some of his Methods and pretences to ruin your Souls by leading you to neglect the Care of them.

Some of your Companions and Acquaintance may also discourage you, may allure you by Mirth, seduce you by the Professions of Friendship and the Promises of Pleasure; or if these fail, may attack you with the arts of Banter and Ridicule; so that if they cannot reason you out of a Care of your Souls, they will endeavour to laugh and scoff you out of it, if you have not some Spirit and Resolution, and are not so just to yourselves, and so grateful to your Redeemer, as to ask of him, and of God through him, the Assistance needful to preserve and defend you in an hour of Temptation. Be sure therefore watch carefully, and be continually on your Guard against the Temptations which assault and surround you. Don't imagine this world a Harbour of Safety and Repose, of Rest and Security, for whatever your circumstances be, Dangers and Snares are planted thick around you. Especially attend to the Temptations most suitable to your sex, your age, and situation in Life; shut your Eyes against the Charms of Pleasure, and your Ears against the Voice of Flattery. Don't admit a Temptation to approach too near you, but resist and repel it on its first appearance. Be jealous over yourselves, and never vaunt and boast of your own Strength and Power; but lay up some of the wise Maxims of Solomon in your Heart, *He that trusteth in his own Heart is a Fool (k). Seest thou a Man wise in his own Conceit, there is more Hope of a Fool than*

(k) Prov. xxviii. 26.

than of him. *A flattering Mouth worketh Ruin (1).*

But above all, consider the necessary Consequence of your being careful or careless of your Souls; that is, providing for their Happiness and securing their Interest in the Favour of God; or leaving them to depart in Ignorance and Guilt, destitute of rational Hope, and full of fearful Apprehensions as to Futurity.

Did you ever see a sensible awakened Sinner dye? — I don't say a stupid one; made so by his Disease, or Medicine, or the righteous Judgment of God, — but I say an awakened Sinner, feeling his own Folly, found out by his Sins, and beholding his wilful, habitual, aggravated and impenitent Wickedness, under the Apprehensions of his approaching and everlasting Damnation? — Or did you ever see a humble believing Christian dye, who had a Desire to depart, and if God saw good, chose then, at that very Instant, to leave the Body and the World, being full of Hope and glorious Expectation, and breathing after a Sight of God and the Joys of Immortality? — If you have, you have seen the Difference which the Neglect or Care of the Soul makes in a Person's Condition at Death. And which of these now would you chuse? Is it possible to hesitate a Moment? As well may we doubt whether Ease be better than Pain, Gladness than Horror, or Life than Death.

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But if it be said, that after all, there is oftentimes nothing distinguishing in the Manner in which good and bad Men go out of the World, but the one dye even as the other. — I admit that this oftentimes may be the Case, arising from a great Variety of accidental Causes. But then you must admit,—and I beg you seriously to consider it—that there is an infinite Difference in the Consequences of their Death. What the Difference is between everlasting Punishment and everlasting Life, they who feel the one and enjoy the other alone fully know. But the Inhabitants of this World may easily know so much of both, as to see it to be infinitely their Wisdom to take the divine Advice and faithful Warning imply'd in this compassionate Expostulation of the Text, *What shall it profit a Man if he gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul? or what shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?*





S E R M O N IV.

On divine Providence.



MATT. X. 29, 30, 31.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the Ground without your Father. But the very Hairs of your Head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more Value than many Sparrows.

OUR Blessed Saviour well knowing that his Disciples would meet with Persecution, for professing his Religion and preaching his Gospel in the World, gives them in the Context, such Advice as was suited to support and encourage them under it. This was, not to provoke their Enemies by any rash or imprudent Behaviour, and yet not to forbear their publick preaching through fear of offending them, ver. 26, 27. *Fear them not — What I*

tell you in Darknesse, that speak ye in the Light: and what ye hear in the Ear, that preach ye upon the House Tops, that is publickly and boldly.

And the Reason he assigns for this Advice is, that the Powers which opposed them were limited, and could reach only the meaner or less excellent Part of the Man. The worst they could do, was to *kill the Body*. They might not be able to do this; But if they did, it was the utmost Extent of their Power, they could not *kill the Soul*. Hands of Violence and Instruments of Death have nothing to do with Thought and Perception. The only Destruction of the Spirit of Man is it's Separation from God, and therefore the only proper Object and Ground of Fear is his Displeasure; *Fear not them which kill the Body, but are not able to kill the Soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both Soul and Body in Hell,* ver. 28.

The next Encouragement our Lord gives his Disciples under the Prospect of Persecution is founded on the Care and Inspection of *Providence*. This is suggested in the Text, where he argues from the less to the greater, and putting the Argument by way of Question makes the Affirmation more strong and emphatical. *Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? Yes, they are; and yet one of them, inconsiderable Creatures, shall not fall on the Ground, either to feed or die, without your Father.* For if the inferior Creation is not for-

forgotten before God, how does his Providence exercise itself about Men, especially good Men, employed in his Service and actually discharging their immediate Duty? why, it watches over all even the minutest concerns of their Lives, and especially Life itself, *The very Hairs of your Head are all numbered, fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many Sparrows.*

From this Passage of Scripture, I think it appears an unquestionable Truth in the Judgment of Christ, that there is a general Providence exercised over all Creatures and Events, and a particular Providence which concerns and interests itself in all things pertaining to the Servants of God.

In discoursing on this Subject I propose,

(I.) To observe some things necessary for the right stating and explaining the Doctrine of Divine Providence.

(II.) To prove the reality and certainty of such a Providence.

(III.) To consider the Nature and Properties of it.

(IV.) To conclude with some Reflections and Advices.

(I.) I am to observe some things necessary to the right stating and explaining the Doctrine of Divine Providence.

By Divine Providence I understand the Wisdom and Power which God continually

exercises in the *Preservation* and *Government* of the World. Now as an Introduction to the Proof of this I would observe,

(1.) That the Light of Nature seems to be sufficient to discover to Mankind the Being and Providence of God.

The Divine Existence and Providence are commonly reckoned among the Principles of natural Religion. The Apostle when he charges the Pagans with Ignorance and Superstition, nay with Idolatry and Atheism, does not allow those Errors to be necessary and unavoidable; but declares that they proceeded from Sloth and Wickedness, want of Enquiry or a want of Faithfulness to their own Convictions. He expressly says, they *beld the Truth in Unrighteousness* (a), and *when they knew God glorified him not as God* (b), but *changed his Glory into an Image, and his Truth into a Lye* (c), i. e. though they might, yet they would not believe his Perfections and Providence; or if they did believe them, yet would not acknowledge them, but owned and honoured fictitious Deities in his stead. They were *in all things too superstitious* (d); inscribed their Altars *to the UNKNOWN GOD* (e); supposed him *to dwell in Temples made with Hands* (f); nay, they thought that *the Godhead was like to Gold or Silver, or Stone engraven by Art or Man's Device* (g): but were these

(a) Rom. i. 18. (b) Rom. i. 21. (c) Rom. i. 23, 25.

(d) Acts xvii. 22. (e) Acts xvii. 23. (f) Acts xvii.

24. (g) Acts xvii. 29.

these vain Imaginations of their dark and foolish Hearts unavoidable? No, *for that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them (b).* The Light of Nature, and the Notions implanted in the Hearts of Men by the God of Nature, if they had been rightly attended to and improved, would have discovered to them much more of the divine Perfections and Providence.

This therefore is justly to be reckoned a Principle of natural Religion, although the heathen World in general did not believe it, because they lived carelessly, and chose to rest in the Ignorance and Superstition wherein they were educated, and would be at no Pains to make Observations on the World or Reflections on themselves. *For the invisible Things of God, from the Creation are clearly seen, by every judicious and diligent Enquirer, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead; so that they, the inconsiderate and slothful, are without Excuse (i).* Nor can I imagine that such unconcernedness about Religion, as prevailed in the heathen World, will be matter of any great Wonder to such who consider the present State of human Nature, or the common Practice of Mankind, under all the Advantages of a divine Revelation.

If it be asked—What did the Heathens really believe and teach concerning Providence? I answer, It is highly probable that many of their

F 4

Philo-

(b) Rom. i. 19.

(i) Rom. i. 20.

sophers knew more than they chose to own, and believed more than they dared to teach. But as to this Point, the different Sects were of different Sentiments. The *Epicureans* entirely denyed it, and taught that all things were fortuitous and casual. The *Stoicks* tho' zealous Asserters of Providence, yet held that the World was governed by an imperious invincible Fate, to which God himself was subject. And even the *Platonists* (eminent as their Leader was for the Wisdom and Sublimity of his Sentiments) thought that though great Affairs were regarded by God himself, yet lesser ones were left to inferior Beings, as Delegates or Officers under him. Some Philosophers were loose and wicked, and so taught what was most friendly to a Life of sensual Pleasure and Indulgence. And though all of them might have known more of God and his Works, and instructed others better than they did, had their Integrity and Resolution been greater, yet none of them did or could, under the Light they had, attain such Degrees of Knowledge herein, as to make a divine Revelation either needless or useless.

Upon the whole, though I admit the Use and Benefit of the Light of Nature, yet I admire and adore the Wisdom and Goodness of God in the clearer and brighter Light of divine Revelation; and can plainly discern how much we are indebted to it in the most important Points both of Truth and Duty, and particularly

larly in clearing and establishing the Doctrine of Providence.

(2.) God in the Course of his Providence, usually effects his own Purposes without disturbing the Order of Nature.

By the Order of Nature I mean, the Course of things originally settled by their Creator, so as that such and such Causes should ordinarily produce such and such Effects; in consequence whereof, one Part of the Creation depends upon another, and Events happen punctually and exactly as God intended they should, without any immediate or extraordinary Interposition of his Power. As a Clock made by the Art of Man, when it is put together and wound up, goes on of itself to the appointed Time, without any Hand to move it, or any Eye to watch it's Motions.

The World we inhabit is a beautiful and magnificent System, in which much of the divine Wisdom and Power are displayed; and in nothing more than in the mutual Dependence of its Parts, and their visible Subserviency to the grand Design of the whole. Thus the Sun revolves from Day to Day and Year to Year, to enlighten the Air, cherish the Earth, and exhale its Dews, which are returned in Showers to refresh and fructify it. The Earth receives the several Seeds committed to it, and by a large return of Fruit in the proper Season, richly repays the Labour of the Sower. Summer and Winter, Seed-time and Harvest, Day and Night keep their Succession. The

Wind

Wind goeth toward the South, and turneth about unto the North: it whirleth about continually, and returneth again according to its Circuit (k):

The several Species of Animals propagate their Kind without Mixture or Confusion: Some Objects are calculated to give us Pleasure, others Pain; some tend to wound, and others to heal us; some Diseases are cured by Skill and Medicines, others are fatal, and destroy the most valuable Life, whatever Means or Prayers are used to preserve it.

Well! these Observations admitted, what Use is to be made of them? The Atheist I suppose, will say——‘Where is Providence then? And how does it appear there is any such over-ruling Power?’ — I answer, It appears from this very Order and Establishment. The Objection carries it’s own Confutation, and is a sufficient Proof of the Doctrine it opposes. For how is it possible to conceive or assign any other Cause of this steady regular Course and Order of Nature, than the Providence of God? As nothing less than infinite Wisdom could have settled it at first, and nothing less than infinite Power have continued it so long.

It is true, God in his Wisdom sometimes sees fit to go out of the usual Way, and either retards or quickens the Springs of Nature, weakens or controlls their Power, in bringing about some extraordinary Events, to shew that He is not confined to Instruments and visible Causes. And this we ourselves have sometimes

(k) Eccl. i. 6.

seen to be so obviously and remarkably the Case, that even those that have been most unaccustomed to Observations on Providence, have been constrained to say, *Who knoweth not by all these, that the Hand of the Lord hath wrought this (1) ?*

But then when he proceeds in the ordinary Course, and we see no such Interposition, Causes being left to operate according to their proper Natures, there is not the least Reason from hence to exclude the Divine Government from the World. Were a Man to say he would not believe that any secret Spring gave Motion to a Watch unless he saw it ; or that the Course of a Ship was directed by one at the Helm, unless he himself conversed with the Pilot, and understood his Art, would he not be thought ridiculously weak and incredulous ? much more ought he to be so esteemed, who disbelieves a Providence purely because it acts according to an uniform System of plain and established Laws ; For in reality this is the very Beauty of Providence, sets it in the most advantageous Light, and fixes in every thinking Mind, the liveliest Impressions and highest Veneration of the divine Wisdom and Goodness.

I would fain know what Unbelievers would say, if God frequently offered Violence to Nature, by interrupting or altering its settled Course ; doubtless this would be deemed a Weakness, would be said to look as if the Work of God, like

(1) Job xii. 9.

like that of Man, stood in need of frequent mending, and furnish Occasion of very bold and impious Exclamation against the divine Wisdom and Government. — The Truth is, our modern Infidels are sometimes so bold and confident, and sometimes so nice and delicate, that one hardly knows where to find them, or what to answer that they will not evade.

(3.) The present Prosperity of the Wicked and Adversity of the Righteous is no sufficient Objection against either the Reality or Equity of Providence.

The number of the Wicked is, and it is to be feared ever will be, greater than that of the Righteous. The solicitations of Appetite, the allurements of Vice, the force of Custom, the weakness of Reason, the strength of Passion, the temptations of Satan, and the vast Influence of sensible Objects, will determine the generality of Mankind to Pursuits unworthy their reasonable Natures. Nor can it be denied, that these often share the richest Bounties of Providence, when worthier Persons are in want; and pass through the World with fewer Cares and gayer Hearts than those who are more deserving. This now, at first Sight, appears to us a strange Paradox, that the infinitely wise and blessed God should heap his Favours on his Enemies, and treat his Friends with so much seeming Severity and Neglect; it hath brought Grief and Pain to many a good Man's Heart, and furnished the Wicked with a plausible Objection against Providence.

But

But let us consider this Objection against the reality or wisdom of Providence, and we shall find it has but little in it, and does not deserve the Stress that has been laid upon it, or the Confidence with which it hath been urged.

For This is not the Case universally. Some good Men have a great Share of outward Peace and Pleasure, Health and Ease, Reputation and Riches; whilst we see their Enemies in the lowest Rank and the most wretched Circumstances of Life. All the Prosperity of the World does not fall to the Share of the Wicked, nor all the Adversity of it to the Righteous. And if this were more generally the Case, it happens only according to the natural Course of Things. For a wicked Man who breaks through the ties of Religion and Vertue, grasps at this World as his All, and resolves to procure and enjoy as much of it as he can, has certainly a great Advantage in some Situations for getting or increasing an Estate above a good Man; who hath learned to curb his Desires of earthly Things, to live above them, to disperse his affluence in liberal Charities, and who dares not be guilty of Fraud, Injustice or Covetousness, for the sake of any present Advantage whatsoever. And nothing can countervail this, but a secret Blast of Providence on the unjust Acquisitions of the Wicked, and a remarkable Blessing on the honest Gains of the Righteous, which is sometimes though not always conferred.

But

But it deserves further to be considered, that though we see many wicked Men in affluent Circumstances, yet their *Prosperity is not always the Effect of their Wickedness*, but their Wickedness often the Consequence of their Prosperity. When a Person is born with a healthy and vigorous Constitution; to a plentiful Fortune and hereditary Honours, he is exposed to many and strong Temptations which too often get the better of a good Disposition of Mind, so that in many Cases, Providence does not confer these seeming Advantages upon Men after they are profligately wicked, but before they become so, and they become so by a licentious Abuse of such Advantages; which takes off a good deal from the Force of the Objection. Besides,

The Foundation of the Objection itself is false; for it is built upon this Principle, 'that worldly Prosperity is in itself a great Blessing, and always to be desired.' Which is so far from being true, that how many in the Abundance of Wealth, Power and Dignity, have by their sinful Excesses rendered themselves the most miserable of Men, insomuch that the honest healthy and peaceful Peasant, has been the Object of their Envy! 'I adore, says a certain Author, the Wisdom of Providence in convincing us of the Emptiness of mere earthly Enjoyments, by conferring them so freely on the most worthless of Men, (which we otherwise should not be so easily convinced of, and) which if they were in themselves real Blessings, he would not do.' So that
the

the very Objection, if considered in this view, is an Instance of the Wisdom of Providence. Again,

If good Men possess not so much of this World as the wicked, they have more Satisfaction in what they possess; they have a truer Enjoyment of their small Pittance than the wicked Worlding has of his Abundance. *The Little which a righteous Man hath is better than the Riches of many Wicked (m).* If his Enjoyments are plain they are pure, if few they are sweet; they are not attended with a Snare, followed with a Sting, or loaded with a Curse. If he has not a Superfluity of earthly Comforts, he has a good Conscience and a contented Mind, Wisdom and Religion for his Guide and Support, Peace and Serenity within, and the most glorious Prospects before Him, and to crown all, he hath the Favour and Friendship of Almighty God, which secures to him that Recompence of Glory that shall hereafter be revealed, and with which all the Sufferings of this present Time, are not worthy to be compared (n).

(Lastly,) The Objection intirely vanishes upon a View of Futurity, or by considering present things in their Reference to future. The Prosperity of the Wicked is always uncertain, often short. Consider their End and your Heart will no longer murmur at the Dispensations of Providence. It was this Thought that intirely quieted the Psalmist's Mind under his Perplexity

(m) Psal. xxxvii. 16.

(n) Rom. viii. 18.

plexity (o). Were this the only State of our Existence, the Prosperity of the Wicked and the Adversity of the Righteous, might be urged as a real Objection against the Equity of Providence; but as it is only a State of Preparation for an eternal one, and as the Afflictions and Sufferings of the Righteous are a necessary Discipline to train them up to Vertue and Happiness; that Consideration cuts the Sinews of the Objection at once. But I have dwelt the longer upon it, because at first View it appears so plausible, that I fear it has had a great Influence on the Minds both of good and bad Men. — I now proceed to observe,

(4.) Though many things are casual or contingent with respect to us, yet nothing can be so with respect to God.

The *Stick's* Fate to which God and Man were supposed to be subject, and their Notions of Fortune as the blind Disposer of Events, beyond all human Foresight or providential Determination, were full of Folly and Extravagance. That there is such a thing as Chance with respect to us is certain; and when no more is meant by it than that Occurrences often happen as are uncommon and improbable, whose Causes are unknown or unforeseen, or produce such Effects as could not be expected by us; such a Notion of Chance is both to be understood and allowed. But what has this to do with the divine Mind, which is full of Wisdom

(o) Psal. lxxiii. 16, 17.

dom and boundless Penetration, incapable of Resistance or Disappointment, conducting every Event to its final Issue, and serving itself of all the Power and Action in the Creation? To suppose such a Being subject to Chance, that is, to suppose any thing to fall out which he did not foresee or could not prevent, is infinitely absurd. For must not he who made and governs the World, who fills all Space, and co-exists with all Creatures in all Parts of the Universe, be necessarily suppos'd to have a perfect Knowledge of the Nature Extent and Power of every Cause and every Agent in it?

Solomon indeed says, that *the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, &c. But Time and Chance happeneth to them all* (p). And he likewise says, *the Lot* (which was used to divide Lands, chuse Officers, decide Controversies, &c.) *is cast into the Lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord* (q). Plainly intimating the vast difference there is between God's Knowledge and Ours, and that what is Chance with respect to us, is Design and Contrivance with respect to him.

Nothing one would think, could be more fortuitous than *Joseph's* being sold into *Egypt*, and all the Steps of his Humiliation and Advancement there, but when his Father was dead, and a Consciousness of Guilt alarm'd the Fears and Reproaches of his Brethren, he quiets their Minds with a Thought equally pious, compassionate, and just. *As for you, ye thought*
G
evil

(p) Eccles. ix. 11.

(q) Prov. xvi. 33.

evil against me, but God meant it unto Good; to bring to pass, as it is this Day, to save much People alive (r). For it was the Preservation not only of *Jacob's* Family, the Church of God, but of the whole Land of *Egypt*.

The Wrath of *Ahasuerus* against Queen *Vashti*, the Advancement of *Esther* to the royal Crown, *Mordecai's* discovering a Treason against the King, that being register'd in the Book of the *Chronicles*, the King's calling for that Book on a Night when he could not sleep, his casting his Eyes on that particular Record, &c. were a Chain of Events, evidently directed by the Hand of Providence, to make way for the Preferment of *Mordecai*, the Destruction of *Haman*, and the Preservation of the *Jews*.

And in that greatest Event of all, the Death of our Saviour Christ, how fortuitous were *Judas's* Treachery, the Malice of the *Jewish* Priests, the Clamour of the People, and the Cowardice of the *Roman* Governor! And yet the Apostle observes, that they deliver'd and crucify'd him by the determinate Counsel and Foreknowledge of God, Acts ii. 23. And more fully, Acts iv. 27, 28. For of a Truth against thy holy Child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and People of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy Hand and thy Counsel determined before to be done.

(5.) God exercises his providential Government in a manner perfectly consistent with the Liberty of moral Agents.

The

(r) Gen. i. 20,

The Liberty of the Will is essentially necessary to constitute the Morality or Immorality of Actions. If Man be not a free Agent, he cannot be the Subject of moral Government, and if he have no freedom of Will, he cannot be a free Agent. If we suppose the Will to be necessarily determin'd without Liberty or Choice, then it will follow, that Man is no more intitled to Reward or deserving of Punishment for what he does, than brute Animals which are moved by Instinct, or inanimate Matter that is moved by the Laws of Mechanism.

And accordingly Atheists who deny the Freedom of the human Will, allow of no moral Evil, but excuse and justify every kind of Conduct on the Foot of *Fatal Necessity*; soon apprehending that whatever destroys the Liberty of Action, of course annuls the Fitness and Justice of future Rewards and Punishments.

But as nothing is more certain on the one Hand, than that Man is a reasonable and accountable Creature, and placed here in a State of Probation and Discipline in order to be train'd up for a State of Perfection and Happiness; On the other Hand it is equally certain, that there is a Providence, which some way or other superintends and over-rules the Conduct even of free Agents so as to secure a Certainty of Events, because without this it would be apparently impotent and useless.

Perhaps we can no more reconcile these two Propositions than we can deny either of them, but as they are both undeniable, they must be

both reconcileable, whether We are able to reconcile them or no. And this is only one Instance among many, that demonstrates the Imperfection of our Powers in constraining us to acknowledge that for certain, which we are forced to confess we cannot comprehend and account for. A humbling Consideration ! enough to mortify the Pride of Man and check the Boast and Petulance of Reason.

To instance in one thing more.—Who will assert (who but an Atheist, I mean,) there is no use in Prayer, or that there is no Connexion between asking and receiving divine Benefits? And yet what sober Christian will undertake to explain how this affects the allwise and immutable God, who *is of one Mind*, and can no more be inform'd by our Observations, than mov'd by our Importunity? Or in other Words, who can reconcile the Necessity of Prayer with the Immutability of the divine Purposes? and yet the common Reason of all the considerate and judicious Part of Mankind will not suffer them to deny either.

And why should not the Ways of God's Providence have their Mysteries, as well as the Works of his Hands, and the Methods of his Grace? They certainly have; and after all our most inquisitive and painful Researches we must be forc'd to sit down silent and satisfy'd with our Ignorance, and leave many Truths we cannot now understand to the Discovery of that State of Light and Perfection God hath given us the Pleasure to expect.

Upon

Upon the whole, we assert a *Providence* not a *Fate*, not a blind ungovernable Necessity, destructive of human Liberty and moral Government, but a Providence which secretly and uniformly effects the Purposes of God, directs all created Power, is never at an Uncertainty with respect to the final Issue of Things, and which frequently over-rules the Actions of Men; a Providence I say, which by an infinite Penetration causes a vast Variety of Means and Instruments to concur in bringing about the wise Designs of God, whilst every Order of Beings is still left to act suitably to its respective Nature, and the Rank in which they are placed in the Creation.

(*Lastly.*) The Providence of God is always to be understood in such a Manner, as not to supersede the Use of proper Means and Endeavours on our Part, or to make him the Author of Sin, or impeach his Goodness in the Permission of Evil.

Some may say, does not Providence thus explain'd, as ascertaining and determining Events, render all human Means and Endeavours unnecessary? I answer—By no means, any more than the Doctrine of divine Prescience, which supposes those Events determinate. And from what hath just been said it appears, that Man is still a free Agent; God leaves him to act according to the Reason and Understanding he hath given him, and hath made it his Duty so to do, by using the Means that are put into his Hands and Power according as he judges them

most proper in any particular Case; and especially as he observes divine Providence most generally co-operating with those Means to bring about the desired Effect, which it very rarely produces without them. In a Word, it is as great Presumption to pretend to trust Providence without the Use of Means, as it is Impiety to trust to the Use of Means without a Dependence on Providence. Again

It may be said, does not this make God the Author of Sin?—No. If Man be still a free Agent, his Sin is certainly to be imputed to himself, who commits it freely and might avoid it, and not to God who providentially permits it.—If it be farther urged, ‘ Could not God, if he had pleased, have prevented it? ’ and is it consistent with his Goodness not to use his Power to prevent so great an Evil? I answer;—Doubtless he had a Power to prevent it, but it was not consistent with his Wisdom so to do; because then he must have put a Force on the Freedom of human Agency, and have acted towards his intelligent Creatures in a manner unsuitable to the Nature he gave them. And whatever is not justified by his Wisdom is not to be expected from his Goodness; which however can find Ways of bringing great Good out of much seeming Evil, as in the End will I doubt not appear to be the Case here. But if it be said

How does it consist with the Goodness of God’s Providence to permit so much natural Evil in his Government, which he could easily prevent?

prevent? It must be remember'd that a great deal of this is the Consequence of moral Evil, or what naturally arises from Man's abuse of his Liberty. And therefore the Answer to the former Objection may serve here.——But if it be still ask'd, ' Why did God make Men with
' such a Freedom of Will, capable of bringing
' upon themselves such a World of Evil both
' moral and natural, when he might have fix'd
' them at once in a State of Perfection and Happiness?' It may as well be ask'd why did God make Man at all, or any World of Beings whatever? or any beside such as are most excellent and perfect? Is he oblig'd to bestow the utmost of his Goodness on every Creature, or impart an equal Measure to all? As well might an Insect demand why it was not a Beast, a Brute why it was not a Man, and a Man why he was not an Angel. Just and ingenuous was the Sentiment of that Heathen who said, *If there be a God, whence then proceedeth Evil?* but upon Recollection answer'd himself, *If there be no God, whence then proceeds Good?*

To have done with Objections. The Truth of the Case is this; God made Man innocent, and endowed him with Reason, Liberty, and active Powers; he abused his Liberty, lost his Innocence, and brought upon himself Guilt and Misery. But God still rules in his own World, and retains his Dominion and Authority over it; He governs all his Creatures in a Way suitable to their respective Natures, has a strict Eye upon the Purposes and Actions of Men, and

has done, and still continues to do, every thing becoming his own Perfections to preserve them; as free Agents, from Sin and Misery, and restore them to Life and Happiness; Witness the light of Nature and Revelation, the voice of Conscience, the admonitions of Providence, the precepts of his Word, the operations of his Spirit, and the promised Rewards of immortal Glory.

These are the Observations I thought necessary for the right stating and understanding the Doctrine of Providence. The particular Proof of the Reality and Certainty of such a Providence must be reserv'd for the ensuing Discourse.





S E R M O N V.

On divine Providence.



MATT. X. 29, 30, 31.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the Ground without your Father. But the very Hairs of your Head are all number'd. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more Value than many Sparrows.

HAVING in the former Discourse on these Words observ'd several things necessary for stating and explaining the Doctrine of Divine Providence; I proceed now

(II.) To prove the Reality and Certainty of such a Providence.

And I apprehend this may be argued,

(1.) From the Existence and Perfections of God,

If

If there be a God there must be a Providence. And that there is a God is known, and proclaim'd by all the Orders of reasonable Beings throughout the Universe. Angels see and enjoy him, Devils believe and tremble at his Power, and Men confess and adore him.

Indeed it is quite inconceivable to me how Men came by the Idea of a God, or why they don't quickly and totally lose it, if such a Being does not exist. If it be said, this is the Case with some;—I very much question it; and many there are, whose Hearts I doubt not secretly reproach them for their profess'd Atheism; and who, sooner or later, will be forced to make a like Confession to that of a noble Penitent, when he declared, 'That he both believ'd and fear'd the Glory and Power of that God against whose Existence he had disputed with all the Wit and Eloquence he was Master of (a).'

A Man may be as sure of the Being of God as he is of his own. For how came any thing to exist at all, if there be not some necessarily existent Being, from whom all others are derived? That any thing should make itself is a Contradiction. There must therefore be some unmade Being who existed necessarily from all Eternity, and by whom all other Beings were made, and that Being is God.

It really hurts the human Understanding to suppose there is no God. The very Imagination is painful. There is something in it unnatural as well as ungrateful and impious. It is like

(a) See Burnet's Life of Rochester.

like lifting up one's Hand to murder a Parent; or driving a Benefactor out of a Place fill'd with his own Bounty. What! banish the Creator from his own World! turn his Being into a Jest! and ridicule him, who demands eternal Reverence! What! behold the Beauty and Order of the Universe, the Glory of the Heavens, and all the Wonders of the Earth, and yet say *there is no God!* This is a Stupidity more than brutish, and an Impiety worse than devilish; for there is not a fallen Angel in all the infernal Regions that thinks at this Rate; and it is not a little astonishing that the human Understanding is capable of so great an Abuse.

Well then, if there be a God, He must be a Being of infinite, (that is, of all possible) Perfections, because all other Perfections flow from him as their Origin and Fountain, and therefore he is able to preserve and provide for the World he hath created, and to govern by infinite Wisdom what he hath form'd by almighty Power. And if he is able, there is all imaginable Reason to believe he does do it.— To say this is above him, reflects Dishonour on his Power; to suppose it below him, casts the like Reflection on his Wisdom. To suggest that the constant Attention requisite to such an Engagement might disturb the Tranquility of the divine Mind, is almost too low to deserve a Reply; However it will lie in my way to take Notice of it hereafter. To suppose that God extends his providential Care only to affairs of Importance and not to lesser things

things, is not merely to deny the Assertion in the Text, but is a Supposition very unbecoming his Omniscience and Omnipresence, two of his essential Perfections. How should an infinitely perfect Being act agreeably to that Character, if he did not know or care what became of the Millions of Creatures he hath made, or the numberless Events which befall them? One wou'd think, he that could indulge so weak a Conceit had a Head as confused as an ungovern'd World, and an ungovern'd World implys an Absurdity little less than that of an uncreated one.

When we see so many Instances of Order and Harmony in all the works of Nature, and such constant marks of Care and Tenderness even among the lowest Ranks of Creatures, which appear so decent, and amiable, who can imagine the most perfect of all Beings can be defective in Benevolence towards his Offspring? Does not the Sun gild and adorn the Air, and replenish the Earth with Beauty and Joy? Does not the Earth nourish the seeds cast into her Bosom? Do not Brutes defend and cherish their Young? Does the Hen deny her tender Brood the shelter of her Wing? Or a Shepherd leave his Flock to wander and fall into the jaws of the Wolf? Does the Mother forget the helpless Infant, or the Father neglect his riper Years? And is there Oeconomy, Order, and propriety of Conduct observ'd through the whole Scale of created Beings, and is it to be supposed that God, the Maker and Lord of
All,

All, falls short of his Creatures in any thing excellent and lovely?

In fine, Is God omnipotent, and yet the World he made, independent on his Power? Allwise, and yet the whole Creation in danger of perpetual Confusion? most just and righteous, and yet unconcern'd for the Welfare of his Creatures? The Lord of the Universe, and exercise no Dominion over it? Omnipresent, and yet indifferent as to Transactions and Events under his immediate Inspection? The Fountain of Love and Mercy, and yet without Concern or Compassion for them that maintain the most sacred regards to his Authority and Honour? All this can never be imputed to a Being of matchless Perfection. Nay the very Supposition implys a Contradiction, for how can he be the wisest and best of Beings, who acts a more unworthy Part than the weakest and meanest?

Thus you see how the Doctrine of divine Providence necessarily results from the Being and Perfections of God. And this is the grand fundamental Proof which is the reason I have dwelt upon it so long, tho' it may not be amiss briefly to subjoin two or three Considerations subservient to the same Design. I therefore add

(2.) The Beauty, Order and Harmony of the World, is a strong Proof of a Providence.

Epicurus indeed and his Followers find a great many Faults with the World; which as they imagine, shew the supposed Maker and
Ruler

Ruler of it to be neither skilful nor benevolent. Such as, the disproportionate Extent of the Sea, barren Mountains, wild Desarts, poisonous Plants and savage Beasts, and to these are added the tears of Infants, the diseases of Men and the certainty of Death. But such Objections plainly proceed from Ignorance as well as Impiety; for had they better understood the Subject they so peremptorily treat of, they would have known that some of these Faults they find in the Works of God, are so far from arguing his want of Skill and Contrivance that they are indeed Demonstrations of his Wisdom and Goodness; and others the Fruit and Punishment of Sin. But sensual Gratification was their grand Pursuit and enter'd deep into all their Views, and this led them to talk sometimes Nonsense and sometimes Blasphemy.

Their shallow Objections against the Providence of God drawn from some seeming Inequalities in his works and ways, break like the Spider's web, or flee like Chaff before the Whirlwind, upon taking a short and impartial View of them. For the Majesty and Kindness of God appear so illustrious herein, as to attract every discerning Eye and impress every grateful and generous Heart. At the very first View of the Works of God, their infinite Variety and awful Grandeur proclaim the Power of their Maker; and upon a more attentive Survey we discover them to be as curious and useful as they are stately and magnificent. So that one may point to them and demand, (to
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the Silence and Confusion of all the Atheists in the World,) who made the Firmament, and plac'd the Sun in it, and appointed it's Motion and Influence? Who mark'd out the Path in which the Stars and Comets roll and shine? Who fram'd this Globe of Earth and supports its Pillars? Who gave the Sea its Bounds? Who bids the stormy Winds lift up it's mighty Waves? Who makes that Storm a Calm? Who ebbs and flows the Sea without Rest, and yet without Disorder? Who bids the Winds arise and fan the Air, or the Rains descend and refresh the Earth? Why do Animals propagate each it's kind, and every Species remain intire, when so many Individuals are continually lost and dye? Is all this Chance or Providence? unmeaning unintelligible Chance, or a wise designing Providence?

Tell us ye Sons of Pride and Ignorance, by what happy Concourse of jumbled Atoms this vast and wondrous Plan was brought to Perfection, or by what secret Energy it's establish'd Order and Harmony has been maintain'd for so many thousand Years? Why is not the Sun hid from the Earth? or why starts it not from it's Centre to overwhelm and burn it? Why does not the Air putrify, or the Sea deluge the Land? Why does the Rain ever fall or ever cease? Why does not the brute Creation rise up in Rebellion against it's weak tho' rightful Lord? How do Nations subsist, and Governments preserve their respective Forms for so many Ages? Who limits and controuls the contending

tending Powers of the Earth, that one does not prevail to the utter Destruction of the rest?

By these and such like Questions, which Atheists can never answer, it abundantly appears that their Objections against the divine Government are weak and insolent; and before they presume to censure what deserves the profoundest Admiration and Reverence, they ought to fix their Eyes with greater Attention on the Works of God and their own Incapacity to comprehend them. Were they to do this, they would see the Flaws they find in the Works of God were really in their own Understandings; and instead of cavilling at this Constitution of Things, would be more ready to join in the *Psalmist's* devout Exclamation, *O Lord, how manifold are thy Works! in Wisdom hast thou made them all* (a).

(3.) Those extraordinary Events and Occurrences which plainly appear to be above the Laws of Nature or contrary to their usual Course, demonstrate the Certainty of a providential Government.

Whoever attempts to account for all the Phænomena and Events in the natural and moral World, from the Principles of Reason and Philosophy, will soon find he hath undertaken a Task to which he is very unequal, and yet before we exclude the Agency of Providence we ought to give a fair and clear Account of these without it.

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(a) Psal. civ. 24.

I well know there is a good deal of Superstition and Weakness amongst Mankind, that warm Imaginations are easily imposed on, and that every thing is not præternatural, which designing Men may pretend, or weak and well-meaning People believe to be so ; but to admit no such Interpositions of the divine Power is most unreasonable Incredulity, and contradicts the Observation and Experience of all the sober Part of Mankind.

To say nothing of Miracles, which yet were as certainly wrought by *Moses* and *Christ* as those two Persons ever lived, and which for their Nature, Variety, and Design could never be equal'd by those which the Heathen Writers, in opposition to them, pretend were performed by *Apollonius*, *Vespasian*, *Pythagoras*, *Æsculapius*, and the Indian *Brachmans*; not to mention these, I say, I would here observe, that some Events happen in the Course of almost every Man's Observation that are not to be accounted for without supposing an immediate Hand of Providence. In this manner have we seen the Lives of particular Persons preserv'd or destroy'd, and Families and Nations rais'd up or brought low to the Astonishment of every considerate Mind. Sometimes the Favours of Heaven bestowed so seasonably, and to all human Apprehension so unexpectedly, that the most careless and inattentive of the Children of Men have been forced to acknowledge the divine Hand from whence they came. And at other times, the Almighty Jehovah hath appear'd

pear'd to a sinful World in such terrors of Vengeance, as to cause the stoutest and most rebellious Hearts to tremble and confess his Presence. Where is the Age or Country whose History does not afford us Instances of both kinds? but we need not travel to distant Countries, or search the Records of antient Times; Revolutions have more than once happen'd in this Nation sufficient to shew, that *Promotion cometh neither from the East nor from the West nor from the South; But God is the Judge, he putteth down one and setteth up another (b)*: and to verify the Observation of Solomon, that *the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, neither yet Bread to the Wise, nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill, but Time and Chance happeneth to them all (c)*.

When Schemes of publick or private Happiness have been wisely laid, and the Execution of them as wisely conducted, and we have just been ready to embrace the happy Event they were design'd to produce, How on a sudden has some Link of the well connected Chain fail'd us, or the expected Blessing vanish'd from our Sight! And on the other Hand, in Seasons of sore Calamity and Distress, when the whole Face of Heaven has been clouded, and all Hope of Deliverance for our Country, our Friends, or ourselves, seem'd intirely cut off, how has Light broke forth out of Obscurity, and midnight Darkness been changed into Noon-day!

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(b) Psal. lxxv. 6, 7.

(c) Eccles. ix. 11.

These Considerations may suffice to satisfy every unprejudiced Mind of the Reality and Certainty of a divine Providence.

I proceed therefore

(III.) To consider the Nature and Properties of Providence.

(1.) The Nature of it in general.

And this may be defined as that Exercise of the divine Perfections whereby God concerns himself in the Events and Transactions of the World, and either mediately or immediately preserves and governs all created Beings. Which leads us to consider the *Object*, and the *Acts* of Providence, and the *Manner* in which it is exercised.

The Object of Providence is the Universe, or all created Nature. The spacious Heavens above us with all their glittering Orbs and unknown Worlds through all the unimagined Expanse of Space, the Worlds of Light and Bliss where Angels shine, the Regions of Darkness and Despair where Devils range, and this Earth which Men inhabit, are full of the divine Power and Presence, and within the Dominion of his Providence.

And as to this Earth in particular, to which our Observations are confined, the Providence of God is exercised with respect to the greatest and minutest Creatures and Events in it. The former we are sometimes ready enough to acknowledge, the latter which we are more prone to overlook, our Text expressly asserts, nor is it beneath the Wisdom of God to re-

gard, what it was not unworthy his Power to create, and they who believe the Doctrine of Providence on the Principles that have been now advanced, may without fear of Superstition and Weakness, (nay they are actually call'd upon by our Saviour in the Text, to) acknowledge it's Hand in those common and inconsiderable Occurrences, which the Generality of Mankind take little Notice of.

And how necessarily dependant the whole rational animal and inanimate Creation, is on the Power and Providence of God, the sacred Scriptures abundantly testify. *The Earth is full of his Riches (d). He sendeth the Springs into the Valleys; He watereth the Hills from his Chambers; He causeth the Grass to grow for the Cattle, and Herb for the Service of Man: that he may bring forth Food out of the Earth (e). The young Lions roar after their Prey, and seek their Meat from God. All living Creatures wait upon him, that he may give them their Meat in due Season, That he giveth them they gather; He openeth his Hand they are filled with Good (f). And even his intelligent Creatures in the freest Exercise of their rational Powers are still under his providential Influence and Direction. For he disappointeth the Devices of the Crafty, so that their Hands cannot perform their Enterprize. He taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness: and the Counsel of the froward is carryed headlong (g). The King's Heart is in the Hand of the Lord,*

(d) Psal. civ. 24.

(f) ver. 21, 27, 28.

(e) ver. 10, 13, 14:

(g) Job v. 12, 13.

Lord, as the Rivers of Waters: he turneth it whither soever he will (h).

The two great *Acts* of Providence are the PRESERVATION and GOVERNMENT of the World.

The PRESERVATION of it, and of all things therein, in that Order Rank and Proportion, which was at first determin'd by their great Original. The common Parent of the Universe provides for the continual Subsistence of his large and numerous Family. The *Psalmist* acknowledges and extolls the Goodness of God in this branch of his Providence, *Thy Mercy O Lord, is in the Heavens and thy Faithfulness reacheth unto the Clouds; O Lord, thou preservest Man and Beast. (i).*

Upon this Principle it is that our Saviour exposes the Folly of a diffident and anxious Solitude about the supplies and accommodations of Life; for as much as that Providence which feeds the Fowls of the air, and clothes the Grass of the field, to be sure will not neglect the Life of Man which is of so much greater Value.

The Preservation of the several kinds of Animals in their respective Orders, and the Continuance of the Earth itself in the Condition it's Inhabitants find and leave it, from one Generation to another, is most apparently the Act of God, Who can assign any other Cause for it but this, that *by him all things consist (k)*? The Cohesion of the Parts of this earthly Globe

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(h) Prov. xxi. 1.

(i) Psal. xxxvi. 5, 6.

(k) Col. i. 17.

we inhabit, notwithstanding it's various and incessant Motions, and the Preservation of the several Species of Animals, notwithstanding the loss of the many Individuals, are a sensible and constant Demonstration that *God is Lord alone, that he hath made Heaven with all it's Host, and the Earth and all that are therein, and that he preserveth them all (1).*

There is not for what we know, any new Matter in the World since its original Formation, nor any kind of Creatures but what were from the Beginning. In the Revolution of near six thousand Years this Globe of Earth hath doubtless suffer'd various Convulsions, and the animal Creation in many respects may be very different from what it was at first; but amidst all the Degeneracy and Desolations of Time, the Providence of God hath so directed, that the same Order and Harmony is still maintain'd in the material World, and the various Species of Creatures are preserv'd in the animal World, without Confusion or Mixture.

This some call *the Order and Beauty of Nature*. By which nothing can be understood but the Wisdom and Power of Providence, *Nature* here must mean either Providence or Nothing, *i. e.* have no meaning at all, for between Providence and Chance there is no Medium, and mere Chance or Accident can no more preserve a World than make one. Without the constant attention of a designing Cause, this Earth could no more accomplish it's Revolutions

(1) Nehem. ix, 6,

lutions than a Ship sail of itself around the World; and 'twould be just as wise and intelligible to ascribe the latter as the former, to the *Order and Beauty of Nature*.

To say there is no Difficulty in conceiving of such a Providence, supporting the Existence and preserving the Order of all created things, is Weakness, but to deny it, is the most perverse Obstinacy; It is putting out our Eyes, imposing on our Understandings, cutting away the Ground from under us, and filling the Mind with infinite Perplexity and Darkness.

The next great Act of Providence is GOVERNMENT.

This is a Branch of Providence very different from the former; and by it I mean that Exercise of the almighty Power of God by which all things are directed to their proper Ends, and are made subservient to the Purposes of his Wisdom.

God always governs his Creatures in a manner suitable to the Natures He gave them. Thus inanimate Beings are necessarily determined by Laws wrought into their very Frame; So the Sun rises and sets, the Sea ebbs and flows, and the Seasons revolve in a perpetual Succession. Animal Creatures are govern'd by Instinct and Appetite, and are thereby made effectually to answer the End of their Creation. But Man who is a free, active, and intelligent Creature, is address'd with Reasons Arguments and Motives, proper to convince his Judgment,

engage his Affections and influence his Conduct.

And this Method of governing moral Agents is no ways inconsistent with the absolute appointment of some Events, and God's perfect Foreknowledge of all, or with the certain Accomplishment of his Purposes of Love and Mercy towards such as believe and obey his Gospel. For in effecting the Counsels of his Wisdom he always adapts the Methods of his Government to the Nature and Capacities of his Creatures who are either the Objects or the Instruments of it. And thus the whole Frame of the Universe is visibly govern'd, by the same infinite Wisdom and Power that form'd it.

Julian the apostate Emperor thought it a mighty Recommendation of the Pagan Religion, and a Point wherein it far excell'd the Christian, that tho' it acknowledg'd a supreme God, yet it distributed the Government of the World among inferior ones. ^b Our Theologians, says he, affirm the Maker of all to be a common Father and King, but that the Nations as to particular Things are distributed by him to other inferior Gods, which are appointed by him to be Governors over Countries and Cities; every one of which administers in his own Province agreeably to himself. For whereas in the common Father, all things are perfect and one is all, in the particular or partial Deities, one excels in one Power

^b In his Book written against the Christians, he thus declares the general Sense of the Pagans,

‘Power and another in another.’ But if there is no Limit or Defect of Power or Wisdom in the supreme Ruler, what Need of assistant or vicegerent Deities? This is to measure the Almighty all-comprehending Mind by ourselves, and to represent him in a Light unworthy his infinite and essential Perfections.

The *Epicureans* thought it beneath the Majesty of God, and too great a Condescension for a Being of his Dignity and Glory to govern this lower World; But this is a weak and childish Imagination, for can there be an Employment more noble or more suitable to the Nature of the most perfect Being, than the Government of his own World, where he finds so wide a Theatre for wise Contrivance and beneficent Action? It is so far from obscuring and diminishing, that it illustrates and exalts the divine Perfections, nay it would be a Reflection on God to suppose he took no Care of the work of his Hand; it would seem unnatural, and look like a culpable Neglect. The Relation of a Creator requires, that what he thought proper to make, he should think it became him to govern? Is it beneath the Wisdom and Goodness of any earthly Ruler to be concerned for the meanest of his People as well as the highest? Nay is it not an essential Maxim of Policy in every wise Constitution?

In short, that the Government of the World is an Interruption to the Tranquillity of the divine Mind, is an Objection founded on low and unbecoming Apprehensions of God. He is an
infinite

infinite Spirit not subject to lassitude or distraction. He can as easily do every thing possible as any thing. Thus we must always conceive of that glorious Being, before whose Eye the darkest Recesses of Nature lie open and unvail'd, and who incircles the Universe in his Arms; a Sentiment which is express'd by the pious Psalmist in very sublime and elegant Language. (a) *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy Presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there: If I make my Bed in Hell, Behold! thou art there. If I take the Wings of the Morning; and dwell in the uttermost Parts of the Sea: even there shall thine Hand lead me, and thy right Hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the Darkness shall cover me: even the Night shall be Light about me. Yea, the Darkness hideth not from thee, but the Night shineth as the Day: the Darkness and the Light are both alike to thee.* And I conceive all Apprehensions of the divine Being inconsistent with these devout Sentiments of David, to be as repugnant to true Philosophy as to sound Divinity. And as God is every where present in all the Glory and Power of his Attributes, even to the utmost Verge of the Creation, and in all the unbounded Regions of Space, there can be no such thing as Nearness or Distance, Ease or Difficulty with respect to him; these being Distinctions and Ideas that owe their Existence and Meaning to the Weaknesses and Imperfection of finite and limited Un-

(a) Psalm cxxxix. 7—10.

Understandings, but which all vanish at the Presence of God, as Vapours of the Night before the rising Sun.

But I proceed, to consider the Manner in which the Providence of God effects the Purposes of his Will.--And this it does either mediately or immediately.

The Providence of God sometimes effects the Purposes of his Wisdom by the Means of Instruments or Agents which he provides and qualifies for that End. And this indeed is his general Method of Conduct: Because it as effectually answers his wise Designs as the more immediate Exertion of his Power, and gives less Interruption to the stated Course and Order of Nature.

But it must be remember'd that the Instruments which God is pleas'd to make use of in accomplishing the Ends of his providential Government are either visible and common, or invisible and extraordinary. The visible and common Instruments are either moral or natural. Thus sometimes he makes use of Men, and at other times the Elements, Fire, Earth, Air, or Water to execute his Designs either in a Way of Judgment or Mercy to the World. And these being visible Instruments, or what we call *second Causes*, we are apt to confine our Regards to them, and look no higher, whereas the divine Agency is as certainly concern'd, and ought to be as religiously acknowledged and adored, in Events which are brought about in this Manner as in any other,

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The invisible and extraordinary Instruments of God's Providence are good and evil Spirits, which are oftentimes (and perhaps much oftener than we think) the Messengers of his Mercy or the Executioners of his Wrath. Instances of both, we frequently meet with in all History, sacred and profane.

But God sometimes exerts more directly his own immediate Power to fulfil his Will. And this he can at all Times do, with the same Ease as make use of Instruments; for it is no more Labour to him to exert his immediate Power (*i. e.* an Act of his Will) than it is to the Sun to shine, and things brought about in this manner (as miraculous Events for Instance) we say are wrought by the *immediate* Hand of God; and so indeed they appear to us, but whether they are not effected by the Instrumentality of some invisible Agent, we cannot determine. However this *apparent* Difference in the Ways of God is a sufficient Foundation for the Distinction of them into *mediate* and *immediate*. I shall conclude this Discourse with briefly mentioning

(II.) The chief Properties of Providence.

Now the Properties of God's Providence are agreeable to the essential Attributes of his Nature, and from what hath been already said we are lead to conceive of it

(1.) As sovereign and uncontrollable.

The Governor of the World is *the Lord God Omnipotent (m)*. *Power belongeth unto him*.

(m) Rev. xix. 6,

him (n). Who hath resisted his Will (o)? Arrest the Sun in his Career, turn the Planets out of their Orbits, stop the rolling of the Sea; All this is not so impossible as to obstruct the Course or frustrate the Schemes of an almighty Providence. O vain Man, who presumest thou hast a Right to question, or a Power to resist the divine Will! Wilt thou disannul his Judgment? hast thou an Arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a Voice like him (p)? The Voice of the Lord is full of Majesty, He uttereth his Voice and the Earth melteth (q). The Pillars of Heaven tremble and are astonish'd at his Reproof (r).

To suppose an irresistible Fate to which the Deity himself is subject, is so senseless a Dream, that one can hardly forbear wondering how it ever enter'd into the Head even of a *Stoick*, or a *Pagan*. It strikes all Intelligence and Liberty at once out of the Universe, and supposes the whole Scale of Beings, the Deity himself not excluded, to be only so many Parts of a grand Machine, invincibly bound to move in that Sphere in which they are severally placed, and consequently incapable of acting freely, or deserving either Praise or Blame. Whereas the Sovereignty or Supremacy of God's Providence is founded on this, that his Designs are form'd upon the most accurate Knowledge of the Nature and Capacities of all his Creatures, and that the Government of the World proceeds according

(n) Psal. lxii. 11. (o) Rom. ix. 19. (p) Job xl. 8, 9.
 (q) Psal. xlv. 6. (r) Job xxvi. 11.

cording to a wise Constitution of his own Establishment which no created Power can controul or confound.—And this leads me to a second Property of divine Providence.

(2.) It is most wise and regular. *He is a Rock, his Work is perfect, and all his Ways are Judgment* (s), i. e. all his Administrations are exactly just and equitable, as if they had been the Effect of the closest Deliberation and Debate; which however necessary it be to the right Determination of weak and fallible Minds, can never be attributed to the all-wise God, who is intimately acquainted with the Secrets of universal Nature, and perfectly comprehends at once all the Qualities Capacities and Powers of his Creatures.

So that the Sovereign and uncontrollable Dominion of God is not like arbitrary or despotic Governments amongst Men, (in which the Welfare of the Community, depends upon the Caprice of a weak and haughty Tyrant,) but like the wise and faithful Care of a Parent over his tender and beloved Offspring, whilst under his immediate Protection. Accordingly the Psalmist cries out with humble Gratitude and Admiration, *O Lord how great are thy Works! and thy Thoughts* (i. e. thy Counsels and Methods of Government) *are very deep* (t).

Ezekiel's Wheels full of Eyes (u) are an Emblem of Providence, which looks every way and is never liable to Mistake or Surprize. For the Schemes of Providence are as regularly con-

(s) Deut. xxxii. 4.

(u) Ezek. i. 16.

(t) Psal. xcii. 5.

conducted as they are wisely contriv'd. To us indeed they may not at present appear so. But the Reason is, *we know but in part*, and judge only by particular Events, without discerning their Connection with or Subserviency to others, or the Concurrence and Tendency of the Whole. As an Infant that beholds a curious Piece of Clock-work, and sees the *Wheels within the Wheels*, all lying together without any apparent Regularity and Order, being intirely ignorant both of the Contrivance and Design, takes it all to be a Heap of Confusion; just so in the grand Machine of the World, we fix our Eyes upon the Motions of one Wheel or two, and whilst we are ignorant of the Spring, Contrivance and Plan of the whole, are ready to pronounce it Confusion and Disorder.

(3.) It is most just and righteous. The Judgments of God are indeed inscrutable, *his Way is often in the Sea*, so that his Footsteps are not to be trac'd by the most piercing Eye, or his Designs to be fathom'd by the most penetrating Mind. And hence Infidels take Occasion to exclaim, and the Humility Faith and Patience of Believers, are put to a Trial. But however, most certain it is that *God is righteous in all his Ways and holy in all his Works; he is a God of Truth and without Iniquity, just and right is He (w)*. There is no False-

(w) Deut. xxxii. 4.

Falsehood in his Heart, nor Iniquity in his Conduct.

Though Sentence against an evil Work be not speedily executed, tho' the Wicked are sometimes clothed in Purple and the Righteous mourn, though Ambition tread down the Humble, and Avarice grind the Poor, though Cruelty oppress the Innocent, and Revenge riot in Blood, yet in the Day of final and everlasting Retribution it will appear, that the Ways of God were equal, and that the Judge and Governour of the Earth hath done Right.

(4.) To good Men divine Providence is always compassionate and friendly. *Truely God is good to Israel, even to them who are of a clean Heart (x). The Eyes of the Lord are upon the Righteous, and run to and fro throughout the whole Earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose Heart is perfect towards him (y).* Whatever befalls them will sooner or later turn to their Advantage, and they will find the Path of Duty to have been the Path of Honour and Safety. I might add

(5.) It is steady and constant. The great Governour of the World holds the Reins in his own Hands, and directs them with a fix'd and unerring Eye.

(*Lastly.*) It is universal, and extends its Care and Influence to the whole Universe of created Beings, and to every Individual.

But

(x) Psal. lxxiii. 1.

(y) 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

But these two last Properties having been consider'd in the preceding Discourse, there is no Occasion for me to enlarge on them here.

Thus have I gone through all I propos'd on the doctrinal Part of this Subject. The practical Improvement must be reserv'd for another Discourse.





S E R M O N VI.

On divine Providence.



MATT. X. 29, 30, 31.

Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the Ground without your Father. But the very Hairs of your Head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more Value than many Sparrows.

IN the two preceding Discourses on this Subject, I have

(1.) Observ'd several Things necessary for the right stating and explaining the Doctrine of Providence. As

(1.) That the Light of Nature seems to be sufficient to discover to Mankind the Being and Providence of God,

(2.) God

(2.) God in the Course of his Providence usually effects his own Purposes without disturbing the Order of Nature.

(3.) The present Prosperity of the Wicked and Adversity of the Righteous is no sufficient Objection against either the Reality or Equity of Providence.

(4.) Tho' many things are casual or contingent with respect to us, yet nothing can be so with respect to God.

(5.) God exercises his providential Government in a Manner very consistent with the Liberty of moral Agents.

(6.) The Providence of God is always to be understood in such a manner as not to supersede the Use of proper Means or Endeavours on our Part; not to make him the Author of Sin, and not to impeach his Goodness in the Permission of Evil.

I proceeded then

(II.) To prove the Reality and Certainty of such a Providence.

(1.) From the Nature and Perfections of God.

(2.) From the Beauty Order and Harmony of the World.

(3.) From those extraordinary Events and Occurrences which plainly appear to be above the ordinary Laws of Nature. I then

(III.) Consider'd the Nature and Properties of Providence with regard to it's Objects, it's

Acts, and the Method of it's Administrations,
and observed, that it was

Sovereign and uncontrollable.

Wise and regular.

Just and righteous.

To good Men compassionate and friendly.

Steady, constant and universal.

These things having been particularly consider'd, what remains is the general Improvement of the Subject, which may be compris'd under the following Inferences and Reflections.

(1.) From what hath been said we learn, how fatal and dangerous the Disbelief of a Providence is, in as much as it saps the Foundation of all Religion both natural and revealed.

The *Epicurean* Philosophy, tho' it was the most woeful System of Principles that were ever put together under that Notion, yet such as it is, must be own'd to be consistent enough with itself. For if God did not make the World, it would not be fit to assign him any concern in the Government of it, and if he did not make and does not govern Mankind, they are under no Obligations to fear and obey Him.—If the Formation of the World was owing to a fortuitous Concourse of indivisible Atoms, it was natural to attribute to the Gods also a corporeal Nature, conformable to the original Atoms; and a human Form, as the most beautiful in the animal Creation. And if there be nothing but Matter and Vacuum in the Universe (as these Philosophers hold) then the human Soul must be a material Substance, and consequently dissoluble with the Body. And there-

therefore it was consistent with their Principles to deny a future State of Existence. And if no future State of Existence, then Man's *Summum Bonum* or chief Good must consist in the Pleasures of this Life. And the Soul being of a corporeal Nature, it's Happiness must result from the Enjoyment of corporeal Pleasures. And as Matter is averse to Action, and they suppose the Gods themselves to have a material Nature, their Happiness also must consist in Rest or Inaction; and in order to represent them as the most happy Beings, it was just in *Democritus* (and *Epicurus* who took his Philosophy from him,) to lull them into a profound Tranquillity, and not disturb their Repose by ascribing to them any Province in making or governing the World. Tho' by the Way, if the World could be produc'd and could subsist without them, I see no Occasion for the Gods themselves, and no Necessity to suppose them to exist at all. However this was a plain Consequence of their Principles, and they allow'd it, that if the Gods did not make or govern the World, they had no Claim or Title to the Fear and Worship of it's Inhabitants; If Mankind are not the Objects of their Care, they owe them no Gratitude or Reverence; If *they* have nothing to do with Men, Men have nothing to do with them (a). So necessarily does Reason,

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even

(b) The *Epicureans* indeed allow'd that the Gods were intitled to the *Piety and Veneration of Men*. But by that, I take it, they mean not a religious but a civil Homage; due to them, not on the Account of any Relation they bear to Men,

even under all it's Obscurity and Depravation, force this Conclusion upon the Mind, that the Denial of a Providence undermines the Foundation of all Religion.

I very much question, whether our modern Infidels will care to run all the Lengths of this Philosophy. But if they deny a divine Providence, they ought to do it; for upon that Principle they can erect no consistent Scheme but this; Which indeed would appear plausible enough were it not for the grand Flaw at first; that material Atoms are eternal, could put and keep themselves in Motion, and by a lucky Jumble form a World; which so shocks the Understanding, that the mere Mention of it carries it's Confutation; and *Cicero's* Supposition of composing *Ennius' Annals* by frequently throwing the Letters of the Alphabet upon the Ground at random, is much more probable (*b*).

Most certain then it is, take away Providence and you take away all Religion; a Conclusion which they who are disposed to think lightly of Providence would do well to consider. For what Consequence can be plainer? If there be no God that preserves and governs the World, there is no God that made it, and if there be no God, What or wherefore is Religion?

But

Men, but on account of their exalted Station and Happiness. As it is decent for Persons in a low Condition of Life, to pay Respect to those who are in a much higher.

(*b*) *Cicero de Nat. Deor. l. 2. cap. 37.*

But were it possible to suppose that the God who made the World has no further Concern with it, how gloomy and distressing a Thought is this! It saps the Foundation of every good Man's Peace and Hope, and at once cuts off all Intercourse with God, all Communication with our Maker by Prayer and Thanksgiving, by Love and Dependence for ever.

And however this may suit the Taste of a degenerate World, it fills every serious Mind with Pain and Anguish. How say you, all ye that fear God, Can you live without him in the World? Can you renounce his Word and Worship, quit your Temples and solemn Assemblies, and be reason'd or scoff'd out of the Religion of your Bibles and Closets? Can you forsake your daily Devotions, your weekly Sabbaths, the Word, Sacraments and Prayer? and banish the Remembrance of them from your Hearts? You cannot. No! you know their Worth too well, and have derived too much Satisfaction and Advantage thence, to be willing to part with them thus; and yet part with them you must, if there be no Providence, or at least with all the Comfort and Delight of them; For they will be all vain and fruitless. There will be no God that hears or regards you, and if God has no regard for us, it is to no Purpose that we show any regard to him, If he hears not or minds not what we say or do, what signifies the most unaffected and fervent Devotion, or the most disinterested and exemplary Virtue? If he have no Eye upon our World, we lift up

our Eyes and spread forth our imploring Hands in vain! In short, if God does not govern the World, and search the Hearts and inspect the Behaviour of it's Inhabitants, he will not judge it hereafter; and then Religion is a groundless Hope, the Services and Obligations of it are imaginary and delusive, and the Love and Fear of God are Words without meaning or sense.

But on the other Hand, if God be really present in his own World, and immediately so in his own House, and if as the supreme Lord and Governour of Men, he is the constant Witness and will be the final Judge of their Actions, then is Religion built on a Foundation which can never be shaken, and the Day is hastening when it will appear to the Confusion of a wicked and unbelieving World, that *the Fear of the Lord, that only was Wisdom, and to depart from evil, that was Understanding.*

(2.) We may hence see how much we are indebted to a divine Revelation wherein we are furnish'd not only with the justest Notions, but with a Solution of all the principal Difficulties relating either to the Reality or Equity of Providence.

The Scriptures which contain this divine Revelation, abound with the clearest Discoveries and justest Sentiments of God, his Laws and Will, the several Dispensations of his Mercy and Grace towards Men, and the Provision he hath made for their Peace and Happiness. Here we have a general Plan exhibiting to our View all the Dispensations of Providence in past Generations,

nerations, and giving us (as it were) a distant Prospect into Generations yet to come. Here we behold the wise and uniform Design of God in all his Conduct toward the Children of Men, and particularly towards his own Church and People; and many of those Mazes and Involutions of Providence, that have for a Time stagger'd the Faith of the most eminent Servants of God, are here plac'd in a Light honourable to the divine Perfections and Government, and that clearly demonstrates their Beauty and Wisdom.

A Neglect of these sacred Oracles lies at the Root of all the Scepticism and Infidelity of the present Age; for were they read and receiv'd with the Care and Reverence they deserve, the Existence of God would be believ'd, his Perfections ador'd, his Providence acknowledg'd, and his Unity Purity Eternity and Benignity, religiously maintain'd and vindicated. Men would not *in their Hearts say there is no God*, or deny him that Homage he deserves and demands; they would no longer, through the Pride and Petulance of a vain self-sufficient Mind, affect to put captious Questions in Derision of the divine Works and Dominion; Or if they did, would be quickly silenc'd and overaw'd, and have their Insolence suppress'd by the Solemnity and Grandeur of those Descriptions which the great Jehovah himself gives of his own Works and Ways, with a Majesty of Style and Sublimity of Sentiment never to be surpass'd or equal'd. With what Face can the Infidel list

up his vain Head, when he hears the Almighty addressing him in the following Language?—*Who is this that darkeneth Counsel with Words without Knowledge? where wast thou when I laid the Foundations of the Earth? declare if thou hadst Understanding. Whereupon are the Foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the Corner-stone thereof? Who shut up the Sea with Doors, when it brake forth as if it issued out of the Womb? When I made the Cloud the Garment thereof, and thick Darknes a swaddling Band for it (d) and brake up for it my decreed Places, and set Bars and Doors, and said, Hitherto shall ye go and no further; here shall your proud Waves be stay'd. Hast thou commanded the Morning, and caused the Day-spring to know his Place? Hast thou enter'd into the Springs of the Sea? or hast thou walked in the Search of the Depth? Where is the Way where Light dwelleth? and as for Darknes, where is the Place thereof? Hast thou enter'd into the Treasures of the Snow? or hast thou seen the Treasures of the Hail? Hath the Rain a Father? or who hath begotten the Drops of the Dew? Out of whose Womb came the Ice, and the hoary Frost of Heaven? Knowest thou the Ordinances of Heaven? canst thou set the Dominion thereof in the Earth? Canst thou lift up thy Voice to the Clouds, that Abundance of Waters may cover thee? Canst thou send Lightenings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are? Who*

(d) Referring to the original *Chaos*, describ'd Gen. i. 2.

Who can number the Clouds in Wisdom? or who can stay the Bottles of Heaven, when the Dust groweth into Hardness and the Clods cleave fast together (e)?

Where is the vain and haughty Mortal that does not see the Majesty and feel the Weight of these just and awful Rebukes? or who among the Sons of Infidelity would not blush at the Presumption of putting in an Answer to these Interrogatories of his Maker?

In short, Infidelity is founded in Ignorance and Pride. A just Acquaintance with God and Ourselves would cure both. But whilst Men are content and satisfy'd to live ignorant of God and their own Hearts, their Arrogance and Presumption, tho' ever so extravagant, are easily accounted for, and so is their Infidelity too, which naturally springs from thence. What abundant Reason then have we to be thankful for a divine Revelation, design'd to correct and humble the human Heart by filling it with true and useful Knowledge; which will soon bring us to think more justly of the Works of God and the Ways of his Providence!

(3.) This Subject shews the great Propriety and Usefulness of Prayer.

Whatever Conviction we might have of the Glory and Perfections of God, yet we could have no sufficient Motive or Encouragement to Prayer without a Belief of his Providence. For to what End should we ask the Assistance or Blessing of a Being however great and powerful, and in other respects good and gracious,

who

who never did or will concern himself with the Affairs and Events of our World? But on the other Hand, if a Being of all-perfect Wisdom Power and Goodness, the Maker and Lord of Heaven and Earth, be also the constant Director and the never-failing Protector and Guardian of his Creatures, to whom should they fly for Relief in Seasons of Difficulty and Distress, but to this almighty Friend?

I am well aware of the Exoeption some may be ready to make against the Justness of this Inference, who perhaps imagine that the Doctrine of Providence, as it has been now stated is so far from inferring the Necessity of Prayer, that it may fairly be urg'd as an Argument against it. For if Providence be only the Execution of the immutable Purposes of the divine Mind, to what End are our Prayers? since they can neither inform him of what he did not know, nor prevail with him to alter what he hath already determin'd.

Now for a fit Answer to this Objection, it will be proper to enquire from what Quarter it comes.—If from the Atheists; it is enough to say, that the Inconsistences and Absurdities in their *Atomical* Scheme are infinitely greater than any they can suppose in this Inference, and therefore the Objection can with no face be urg'd by them to procure Profelytes to their Party; for it's much easier to reconcile the Propriety of Prayer with the Doctrine of Providence, than to reconcile their Notions with any Principles of common Sense.

If

If it come from the Deists, who believe a God and a Providence, they raise an Objection against themselves, for Prayer was ever esteem'd a Part of natural Religion, and the Propriety of it concerns a consistent Deist as much as a conscientious Christian.

But if it be only a Scruple arising in the Mind of a real Christian, it may be sufficient to reply, that Prayer is an undoubted and indispensable Duty both of natural and revealed Religion; and therefore though he should never be able fully to reconcile the Necessity of it with the Immutability of the divine Counsels, yet he ought not and cannot consistently with his Principles live in the Neglect of it; with the same Reason may he neglect the Use of common Means and Endeavours to promote his secular Interest, (because if God is not pleas'd to bless and prosper them they are all in vain); or refuse to use his Understanding and exercise his Judgment as a free Agent, because he cannot reconcile the Liberty of Action with the Doctrine of divine Prescience. But for his further Satisfaction I would observe,

That this Objection; whatever there be in it, lies only against one Part of Prayer, and that not an essential Part neither, *viz.* Supplication or Petition. For Adoration of God, a devout Recognition of our Dependance upon him, a penitent Confession of our Offences against him, and a thankful Acknowledgement of his Favours are as important Branches of Prayer as Supplication; and against these the Objection hath

hath no force at all; and when it's urg'd against that other Part of Prayer, call'd Supplication or Deprecation, it is worth observing,

That however plausible it may appear at first view, yet it plainly carries in it something that is unnatural and shocking. For it supposes we are sensible of our Wants, and persuaded that God can supply them, and yet apprehend we need not express those Wants to him or seek those Supplies from him. Would a Child act thus, even though it knew it's Father was acquainted with its Wants and Desires? or would the Father approve it's Temper and Behaviour if it did?

We are now come to the Bottom of the Objection; it is not so much as intended to be an Argument against Prayer in general, but only against the Necessity of *Supplication*, and even as to this (which God particularly requires and encourages in his Word) it is so far from being an Argument against the Necessity of it, that it is only an Argument for Reverence, Humility and Submission in the Use of it, which I think, is a sufficient Solution of the Difficulty.

The Doctrine of divine Providence then far from disannulling our Obligations to Prayer, recommends and enforces them, setting the Use and Propriety of it in the most striking and beautiful Light. It is a proper Expression of our Dependance and Gratitude, promotes the best Sentiments and Dispositions, pacifies and guards our Hearts, raises our Thoughts and Affections to Heaven, unites our Spirits to God, is the
evident

evident Means of Peace and Happiness to our Souls, and hath been the perpetual Practice and Delight of all pious Minds in all Ages of the World, and what no good Man dares or desires to restrain.

(4.) The Doctrine of Providence rebukes the anxious Solitude of good Men about future Events, and lays a sure Foundation of their Trust in God.

It is no Wonder indeed that atheistical and wicked Men should be full of Fears and Disquietudes about the unforeseen Occurrences of Life; that they who either disbelieve a Providence or have forfeited its Protection and Favour, should be anxiously concern'd at what may hereafter befall them; and I really wonder that such Men do not more frequently discover the most painful Apprehensions and Agonies of Mind at the first gathering Cloud and the most distant Prospect of Calamity. But that good Men, Men of Religion, whose Faith and Fear of God are founded on his unchangeable Perfections, who believe that he governs the World, that all things are under his immediate Eye, that he will do that which is right in itself and best for his People, and who have reason to account themselves the Objects of his special Care; that these, I say, should be perplex'd with Doubts and Fears, this is really surprising, and argues a sinful Distrust, unworthy their Character, dishonourable to God, and the Profession they make of Trust and Dependance upon him.

For

For what more solid Considerations can be urg'd to fortify and confirm the Mind under the Apprehensions of approaching Evil than these, that in all the Mazes and Changes of Life, they are under a divine Direction, that the most gloomy or threatening Dispensations are well and wisely order'd, and made subservient to some good and wise End, and in the mean Time the Interests of them that fear and love God have the Security of his infinite Perfection? What remains then, if we hope we are of that Number, but to possess our Souls in Peace, leaving the Government of the World to him who alone is equal to the Work, and *casting our Care upon him who careth for us?*

(5.) The Doctrine of divine Providence as before explain'd is a strong Argument of a future State.

Wise and righteous as the Dispensations of God are, they are incapable of being vindicated upon any other Supposition than this, that there is a future State of Recompence which will disperse the Darknes and unravel the Mysteries of Providence, when *every Man shall be judg'd according to his Works, and receive the Fruit of his Doings.* This reconciles us to the present promiscuous Dispensation of Good and Evil, and sets the Mind at ease when we see *all things come alike to all.* We are no longer shock'd at observing the Peace and Prosperity of the Wicked, when we consider they are *treasuring up for themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath;* nor griev'd to behold the Sufferings of the Righteous, when we reflect that

that God is exercising and improving their Virtues and training them up for greater Degrees of Happiness and Glory.

‘ O, may some say, what strange and sad
‘ Things happen in this World! dark, perplex-
‘ ing, intricate and amazing Things! How do
‘ the Wicked triumph and Cruelty and Per-
‘ fidy prosper! No Stop put to the Power and
‘ Malice of Oppressors, Persecutors, and other
‘ Enemies of God and Men! not only parti-
‘ cular Persons suffer undeserved Mischief, but
‘ Families are distress’d, Nations overturn’d,
‘ and Wickedness and Misery, like a Deluge,
‘ cover the Face of the Earth!’——Well! and
thus it will be, till the Scheme of Providence is
finish’d, and then the Face of Things will
change. In the mean time, Providence is un-
folding it’s Plan and proceeding in it’s Course,
wisely without Disorder, steadily without Va-
riation, and continually without Intermission.
And what ever Darkness or Confusion there
may be in the World, there is none in the di-
vine Mind; and when this wondrous Scheme
is accomplish’d, we shall then admire what we
are now ready to censure, see that to be a Beauty
we esteem’d a Deformity, and discern the Ex-
pediency if not the Necessity of many
things, which at the Time they happen’d, ap-
pear’d to us, without any Meaning End or
Use.

‘ Arise then, O my Soul, and stretch thy
‘ Wings towards Heaven; the pure and perfect
‘ Light of that World will at once dissipate all

‘ the Gloom that hangs over the Ways of God
‘ in this. There the divine Perfections and
‘ Administrations will mutually illustrate each
‘ other, and the whole Scheme of divine Pro-
‘ vidence being unfolded to thy View, shall
‘ prove a Subject of thy delightful Wonder
‘ and everlasting Praise.’

(6.) The steadfast Belief and Contemplation of divine Providence tends greatly to exalt our Conceptions of the divine Glory and Perfections.

If God sustains the World by the same almighty Hand that made it, if he preserves the Order of the Universe, and upholds the Life and Happiness of his Creatures, if he rules *in the Armies of Heaven*, in the Regions of Hell, and *among the Inhabitants of the Earth*, if he *worketh all Things according to the Counsel of his own Will, sees the End from the Beginning*, looks at once backward to the Origin, and forward to the Consummation of all things; if he steadily pursues one uniform consistent Scheme of Wisdom Righteousness and Goodness, thro’ the whole Succession of Ages and Events; if he secretly but powerfully checks the Ambition of some, restrains the Malice of others, confounds the Devices of many, and answers his own Purposes by all the Wisdom and Power there is in the World; How glorious, how infinitely venerable and amiable a Being must he be! How does such a Contemplation of God and his Ways ennoble and elevate the human Heart, and exalt our Ideas of the divine Glory
and

and Dominion! *Who is a God like unto our God? Who can utter his mighty Acts or shew forth all his Praise!*

It is observ'd by some that the Ways of God illustrate his Word; we may add, they are the best Comment on his Attributes. In his Providences he visibly displays his Perfections; so that what he is declar'd to be in his Word, that we behold him in his Works, an all-powerful, all-wise, all-gracious, and ever faithful God; here we read his Name in the most lively and legible Characters, and the Perfections of his Nature are as it were, brought down to our Senses. We see his Wisdom, we hear his Power, we feel his Faithfulness, and we taste his Mercy. O then while we read his Word, let us not forget his Ways! let us meditate the Book of Providence as well as that of Scripture, which so clearly interpret each other, and both concur to fill the Mind with the most magnificent Ideas of the divine Nature and Perfections.

(7.) How unbecoming is it in them who believe a divine Providence to confine their Views to second Causes and external Instruments.

Sometimes we see an Event so unusual and unexpected, requiring such an exact Coincidence of Time and Circumstances, and such an extraordinary Concurrence of auxiliary Events to produce it, that it is next to impossible not to discern the immediate Hand of God. How often is this the Case with regard to the sudden and transient Alteration of Men's Con-

ditions, from Prosperity to Adversity, and from Adversity to Prosperity! and the same is visible in a thousand other Instances, that fall under our Observation and Experience.

How wise and pious the Reflection which *Job* made under his grievous Calamities! *The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, Blessed be the Name of the Lord (f)*. The *Sabeans* and *Chaldeans* were the immediate Causes of his Losses, but he consider'd them only as Instruments in the Hand of the supreme Director and Disposer of All. So *David*, when *Shimei* curs'd him and *Abishai* desir'd Leave to chastise his Insolence, forbad it; saying, *Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Behold my Son which came forth of my Bowels seeketh my Life, how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine Affliction, and that the Lord will requite good for his cursing this Day (g)*. And this is the Light in which all the Children of God view, or ought to view the various Events which happen to them in this World, whether they are brought about by natural or moral Instruments.--But under this Head it may not be amiss briefly to subjoin two or three Cautions against running into Mistakes in our Observations and Constructions of Providence.

Not to consider and mention any thing as an Instance of the remarkable Hand of Providence which is the obvious and natural Effect of
second

(f) Job i. 21.

(g) Sam. xvi. 10, 11, 12.

second Causes, and which almost every one acknowledges to happen according to the stated Course and Order of Things; to impute such ordinary Occurrences to the extraordinary Hand of God, is a weak and childish Habit which some devout Persons indulge; but from whatever Principle it proceeds, serves only to expose their own Judgment and the Doctrine of Providence to Contempt. Again, not to be too hasty in pronouncing upon the Designs and Ends of Providence in particular Events; we can look but a little Way into the Scheme of Providence, and therefore are very liable to mistake its Designs; of which the Case of the Patriarch *Jacob* and his Family is an illustrious Instance. We know neither the Tendency of many things we do see, nor what Connection they have with others we do not see, so that we are very incompetent Judges of their principal Intention. As well may a Person who never saw a Watch pretend to explain the Artificer's Design before he hath put the Wheels together; or a Peasant judge of the Measures of the Government, who is ignorant of the Interests Power and Politicks of the *British* Court, and of every other Court in *Europe*. Further

Not to give our Imagination and Credulity too much Rein; by laying Stress upon Trifles and common Incidents, as Dreams, sudden Impulses, &c. which are often merely casual or chimerical, or the Effect of a distemper'd Body; nor by greedily imbibing every Report of miraculous or præternatural Events without pro-

per Evidence of their Truth. This is the Complexion of a weak superstitious Mind, where by Men's Understandings have been often deluded, till further Lights and Facts have disabus'd them, tho' not without the Expence and exposing their Judgments. Finally,

To guard against a censorious Construction of those afflictive Providences that befall others, to which some Persons are too much addicted by the Influence of Self-flattery, ill nature, or a party Spirit, notwithstanding our Saviour's exprefs and solemn Caution and Warning against it (b).

(8) What hath been said upon this Subject, should perfectly reconcile us to all the Mysteries and Darknes that may appear in the divine Conduct.

Mysteries and Darknes there ever will be, Mysteries inexplicable and Darknes impenetrable, because God's *Ways are not as our Ways, nor his Thoughts as ours*. If his Wisdom is unfathomable it is no wonder his Ways are incomprehensible. And when we see awful and intricate Dispensations that perplex and confound us, let us learn Silence and Submission, always imputing that to our own Ignorance, which we are too apt to impute to a Want of Wisdom or Goodness in God.

Let us not be stagger'd when we consider the unequal Circumstances of good and bad Men, the Entrance of Sin, and the ravage it has made amongst the Works of God, the untimely Deaths of the best and most useful Men, and the

(b) Luke xiii. 2--5.

the long Lives of those who are not only useless, but the most troublesome and pernicious Members of Society; when we see no *Sentence executed against evil Workers*, and no Countenance shewn to humble pious Sufferers; on such a view of Things, I say, let not our Hearts be dejected; they appear strange, 'tis true, but there is one thing more strange than all this,——That Creatures of a finite Understanding should imagine themselves capable of comprehending the vast extended Views and Designs of infinite Wisdom.

To conclude, what remains upon a Review of the Subject, but that we firmly believe the Reality Wisdom and Equity of divine Providence;——that we repose a firm unshaken Dependence upon it in all Circumstances and Events;——That we eye it in the whole of our Passage thro' Life; learn its Instructions, attend to its Admonitions, Directions, Rebukes; interest it in all our Affairs; endeavour to secure it's Protection and Guidance, and never repine at it's Disposals or presume to censure it's Government?

And let me now, before we part, earnestly exhort you to take this Opportunity to review the particular Instances of the divine Bounty and Benignity towards you, for which Exercise the foregoing Discourse may have brought you into a proper Frame. Fall in then with the present pious Disposition and improve it, sit down and call to mind the various Scenes thro' which you
have

have pass'd, the Places you have liv'd in, the Afflictions you have suffer'd, the Comforts you have enjoy'd, the Temptations you have encounter'd, and the providential Care and Mercy extended to you in and through all. You will probably find your whole Life fill'd up with Favour, which ought at sometimes to be solemnly recognized and acknowledged with answerable Gratitude and Thanksgiving; More particularly,

Review the several Stages of your Life, and the Mercies you have receiv'd in each; Who nurs'd your helpless Infancy, guided your giddy Youth, directed your manly Years, supported your feeble Age, if you have attained that Period? Who but that God who gave you Being and is willing to be your Guide even unto Death?

Recollect especially your peculiar and distinguishing Mercies; the Advantages of Birth, Education, Wealth, Interest and Friendships; and by what kind disposals of Providence some of them were conferr'd; on which perhaps depend your greatest Comfort and Usefulness, and which you daily see with-held and deny'd to thousands around you.

Call to mind the remarkable and extraordinary Occurrences you have met with; those which once surpriz'd and much affected you. Consider them again, and revive the Impressions they first made on you; perhaps they were in answer to your Prayers, either for the Removal of some sore Affliction, the preventing some
appre-

apprehended Evil, or the Possession of some desirable Mercy; and if so, such kind interposures ought by no Means to be forgotten, but improv'd by frequent and grateful Recollections.

Remember the Supports that have been administred to you under Adversity, the Benefit you receiv'd from it, and the Mixtures of Compassion, and Circumstances of Alleviation that have attended your Days of Sorrow.

Think also of the Mercies of your Prosperity; How rich, how free, how suitable and seasonable! The two last Considerations often double the Value of our Mercies, and therefore should be seriously regarded to excite and enhance our Thankfulness. Especially

Review your present Mercies; don't despise or depreciate them because they are common or have been long enjoy'd. The long Enjoyment of a Mercy is indeed apt to wear out or lessen our Sense of it, whereas it ought to be a Reason of our more enliven'd Thanksgiving; for is not the Continuance of Health as great a Blessing as a Recovery from Sickness? the preventing our Distress, as great a Mercy as a Deliverance out of it? and should not Mercies daily renew'd, be every Day look'd upon as new Mercies? But above all,

Do not forget your spiritual Mercies. The kind and gracious Things God hath done for your Souls. Review with devout Gratitude and high Delight, the Means the Time the Instrument and happy Occasions, that led you off from Sin, and drew your Hearts to God.

Make

Make wise Reflections on these things; offer your Prayers and Acknowledgements to God; resolve to continue humble, diligent, watchful, dependant, and frequently aspire after that happy State and World where you shall admire and adore the loving Kindness of God to all Eternity.



SERMON



S E R M O N VII

Of the Connection between Faith and
Salvation.



A C T S xvi. 31.

*—Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and
thou shalt be saved.*

THE Story from whence the Words of the Text are taken is this. The Apostles *Paul* and *Silas* had dispossest a certain Damsel at *Philippi* of a Spirit of Divination, who brought her Masters much Gain by Sooth-saying : They suffering a considerable Loss hereby carried their Resentments so far as to incense the Magistrates and the Mob against the Apostles, upon a Pretence that these *Jews* taught Customs which it was not lawful for the *Philippians* to receive, referring to the *Roman Law* which forbad them to worship any new Gods; whereupon the Apostles were beaten and imprison'd, and as if their Crime had been of the most heinous Nature, the Jailor was ordered to keep them *safely*; in pursuance of which Instruction

struction they were thrust into the inner Prison, and their Feet made fast in the Stocks.

Paul and Silas nothing terrify'd or dejected with this barbarous Treatment, pray'd and sung Praises to God so loud and fervently at Midnight, that the other Prisoners heard them with no small Surprize ; but how was their Astonishment increased, when suddenly they felt a violent Earthquake, so that the Foundations of the Prison were shaken, and immediately all the Doors were open'd, and every one's Bands were loos'd. The Keeper of the Prison being awaken'd and alarm'd with the Shock, and seeing the Doors unbarr'd, and supposing the Prisoners to be fled, was going to dispatch himself with his own Sword ; for his Religion allowed, at least did not forbid *Self-murder*, in order to avoid any great Calamity ; and the Laws of his Country required, that they who suffered Prisoners to escape, should undergo that Punishment, which was intended to have been inflicted on them ; but Paul prevented the Execution of his fatal Design, by crying out with a loud Voice, *Do thyself no Harm, We are all here.* Then He call'd for a Light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said " *Sirs What must I do to be saved ?*" Now to this important Question the Words of the Text are a reply : *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*

The Office of a Jailor will sufficiently warrant an Apprehension, that he might be a Man of considerable Intrepidity and Courage, and probably

probably not of the tenderest Mould for receiving any kind of Impressions; and it is not unlikely he might have been guilty of Acts of Extortion and Cruelty, or of Intemperance and Debauchery; but whether he was a very heinous and flagitious Sinner or not, so alarming a Providence as this, which seem'd to threaten him with utter and immediate Destruction, could not fail calling to his Mind the Iniquities of his past Life, whatever they had been, while at the same time it open'd to his View, an awful Passage into the other and unseen World. A Situation so dangerous and decisive, shock the Firmness of his Soul, and threw him into the most dreadful Agonies, whilst it just left him Time to reflect on the amazing Resolution, and noble Generosity of his two Prisoners, who in the Midst of so tremendous a Scene, appear'd entirely calm and unconcern'd for themselves, and yet kindly solicitous for his Preservation.

Such a Conduct alone, but especially if coupled with any general Notions of the Purity of their Doctrine and Innocence of their Lives, must naturally fill him, tho' a Jallor and a Pagan, with some Awe and Esteem of the Apostles, which probably was heighten'd into Reverence, from an Apprehension, that Heaven was avenging their Cause, and declaring its Resentment against the Persecutors of these excellent Men. How natural then was it in such Circumstances, for the Distress of his Heart, under some glimmerings of Hope, arising from the Treatment he had

had already met with, to address them in this abrupt and affecting Language, *Sirs what must I do to be saved?*

It would be unnecessary to labour the Proof, That this awakened Sinner was not merely concern'd for the Preservation and Safety of his Life. It is plain by his applying to the Apostles, from the Answer they immediately return'd, and the fuller Instructions they afterwards gave him, when *they spake to him the Word of the Lord and to all that were in his House*, that he intended, and they understood him to express his concern for his final everlasting Salvation. And taking the Words in this Sense they contain the most important Inquiry in the World, well-becoming the Lips of every considerate Man, who knows he is a Probationer for Eternity, and therefore the right understanding the Answer in the Text deserves our most diligent Attention. In order to which I propose,

I. To explain the Terms *Faith* and *Salvation*; And

II. To shew the Connection there is between Faith and Salvation, and the fitness of that Connection.

I. I am to explain the meaning of the Terms. What then is *Salvation*?

Now the Salvation here intended by the Apostles undoubtedly refers to the Recovery of Mankind to the Favour of God, and their Qualification for enjoying him as their final Happiness and Portion. It supposes our Apostacy from God,

God, the Guilt we had contracted, and the Misery to which we were exposed; and being born under the Power of a depraved Nature and continuing to indulge corrupt Inclinations, we gradually increase our Aversion to God, and to all that is holy and heavenly: *For the carnal Mind is Enmity against God*, and during the Prevalence of this Disposition, we are unavoidably Objects of his Displeasure, and before we can be capable of that substantial and exalted Happiness, which consists in his Enjoyment and Favour, there must be a removal of his Displeasure against us, and of our Disaffection to him: In order to which our Lord Jesus Christ was appointed a Mediator between God and Man. And as such

He removes the Displeasure of God. For the Rights of Deity by our manifold Transgressions had been so impiously invaded, That God thought it not honourable to his Perfections, to pardon our Iniquities without a Sacrifice of Atonement, and judg'd no other beside that of his own Son, worthy his Acceptance. *He hath therefore reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, Whom he hath set forth to be a Propitiation.* Further

Christ removes the Disaffection on our part, by the sanctifying Influence of his Spirit, subduing the Power of Sin, and subjecting the Heart to God, and in order hereunto, appointing proper Means and Institutions for the gradual removal of *their* Enmity to God, who are the Subjects of this Salvation, and for forming
them

them to Sentiments and Dispositions that are divine and heavenly. *For after that the Kindness and Love of God our Saviour toward Man appear'd; not by Works of Righteousness which we have done, but according to his Mercy he saved Us, by the washing of Regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour (a). And thus our Salvation becomes compleat in the Likeness and Favour of God.*

Tho' I make no doubt this was what the Apostles meant in the Text by being *saved*, yet I do not assert it was understood in this full and comprehensive Sense by the Jailor in his Enquiry, to which the Text is an Answer. However it may well be supposed, he knew himself to be a Sinner, and therefore obnoxious to divine Justice, and having some Apprehension or Belief of a future State, was afraid of appearing in the presence of his Judge under the Guilt and Power of his Sins; He might be sensible in the general, of the Greatness and Danger of his Disease, tho' he knew not its original Cause, its extensive Nature and destructive Tendency, any more than the proper and prescribed Method of its Cure. But I am not obliged to confine my Account of Salvation to the Idea the Jailor had of it, if that could be more certainly known; for the Gospel having held it forth to us in its full Sense, the more effectually to impress our Hearts and secure our Regards to it, we are obliged seriously to consider
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(a) Tit. iii. 4, 5, 6.

and thankfully to embrace it in all the Variety of Representation that is there given us.

Our next Enquiry is, what is meant by *Faith*? Now Faith in the original and primary Signification of the Word, is nothing more than the Assent of the Mind to the Truth of a Proposition upon reasonable Evidence; and *believing in the Lord Jesus Christ* in this Sense, is the Mind's being persuaded of the Truth of what is related and declared by him and of him in the Gospel. But the Faith generally meant in the Scripture, and which is connected with eternal Life, and said to be the Fruit of the Spirit, is something more than a mere Faith of Assent, and is made to include those right Affections, and good Dispositions of Mind, which a Conviction and Belief of such Truths might reasonably be expected to produce; and when it does not produce them, the Scripture calls it a *dead Faith*. So the Apostle *James* declares, *That Faith without Works is dead. Was not our Father Abraham* (says he) *justified by Works, when he had offered Isaac his Son upon the Altar.*(a) Now the Phrase *Works* is manifestly used here in the same Sense as justifying *Faith* is in other Places, for what Works were they by which *Abraham* was justified? Did he actually offer up his Son? No; he only in Consequence of his being convinced that God had commanded him to offer up his Son, shewed a Readiness of Mind, to conform to the divine Will, which good Disposition considered in its Principle, might be called his *Faith*,

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or

(a) James ii. 20, 21.

146 *Of the Connection between* Sermon. VII.
or in its Effect, his *Works*; and accordingly the
Apostle *Paul* says, that *Abraham's Faith was im-
puted to him for Righteousness.*

This Notion of Faith may be illustrated by
considering it with respect to the different Ob-
jects of it. If *future* Things be the Objects of
our Faith, this represents them according to
their real Importance, and impresses them on
the Mind, as if they were present. Is a God
of infinite Perfections the Object of our Faith?
we shall then admire and adore his Wisdom,
esteem and celebrate his Goodness, and fear and
reverence his Power: When we consider his
Authority, we shall submit to it; his Grace,
we shall glorify it. Thus if our Lord *Jesus
Christ* is the Object of our Faith, it produces
in the Mind those devout Affections, and Re-
gards that are correspondent to the several Cha-
racters which he is represented as sustaining,
and those Affections and Regards produce a
correspondent Practice and Behaviour. As
Mediator, Faith leads the Soul to approach to
God only in his Name, and to expect Audience
and Acceptance through him; as our *Propitia-
tion*, it depends on that alone to expiate our
Guilt, and discharge our Obligation to Punish-
ment; and both these Views of him touch the
Springs of Gratitude in the Heart, kindle a
Flame of divine Love there, and engage our
Attention to him as the great Prophet and
Teacher sent from God, the only Law-giver
and King in his Church, and over his own
People, and the perfect Exemplar and Pattern
of

of every Grace and Virtue, after a nearer Conformity to whom we are to be continually aspiring.

From hence it plainly appears, that the Faith necessary to Salvation, or that *believing on the Lord Jesus Christ*, which is connected with our being saved, includes those Dispositions of Mind, which a hearty and thorough Persuasion of his being a divine Person, and of the Truth of his Gospel, is suited to produce. And this leads us,

II. To consider the Connection there is between Faith, as before explained, and our Salvation, together with the Fitness of that Connection.

Now this I think will plainly appear from the following Considerations.

1st, Because the most solid Foundation is laid, and sufficient Evidence offered for such a Faith as is required of us.

This Reason is peculiar to that Notion of Faith, which represents it as an Act of the Understanding, or Persuasion of Mind as to the Truth of a Proposition. We are not required to believe we know not what, to profess Faith in we know not whom, or believe the Gospel we know not why. We are not aw'd into our Faith, and by a Rod held over us, terrified out of a Liberty of private Judgment; "nor required in the tractable Simplicity of unpractised Reason, and with all the obsequious Submission of a dutiful Understanding, to sit
L 2 " down

“down and learn our Lesson,” (b) as a late Infidel Writer in the Wantonness of his Wit is pleased to represent us ; for we are not only permitted, but commanded to use our Reason and Understanding as Men, to judge of the Proofs and Evidences of the Christian Revelation. An impartial Regard to Truth, and a careful Examination of the Contents of the Gospel, are expected and demanded of us ; and as we have no Right to refuse this, so we have no Reason to imagine it will not answer its proposed End, and produce a thorough Conviction of its divine Authority.

The Guilt of Infidelity must always be proportionable to the Strength and Perspicuity of the Evidence it rejects, and the clearer and stronger the Evidence is, by which the Gospel is attested, the more dangerous is a wilful Rejection of it. Now He who hath a perfect Knowledge of our Souls, and of the Extent of their Capacities, and who knows what Kind of Evidence is fit to be offered us, has been pleased to adapt the Evidences of the Christian Revelation, not to our corrupt Passions and Prejudices, which will often yield to no Degree of Light or Argument, but to the rational Powers of the human Mind, in such Measure as he knows to be fully sufficient for their Conviction, if they be seriously and impartially considered.

And now may not God in such a Case as this, demand our Belief? This indeed is what I have no Right to demand of another, because
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(b) See Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 75.

the Credibility and Evidence of any Proposition may appear much stronger to me than it does to him, from the different Reach and Capacity of our intellectual Powers, and the various Light in which we may view it. But the Case is otherwise with Respect to God, who hath a full and perfect Comprehension of the Nature and Capacities of human Minds, which were formed according to his own Model, and of the clearness of the Evidence with which the Doctrines of the Gospel appear to them; and therefore he may annex the Threatening of a proper Penalty, if they continue in Unbelief.

I would only ask this plain Question: Dare any of the Sons of Infidelity lay his Hand upon his Heart, and solemnly appeal to the Omniscient God, that he hath diligently searched the Scriptures, and the external and internal Evidences of their Truth and Divinity, and hath weighed them in the Ballance of unprejudiced Reason with a sincere Desire of knowing the Will of God, in order to do it; and that he is not able to discern any sufficient Evidence of their divine Authority; that he rejects them not out of any evil Disposition of Mind, but from clear Conviction, and a sacred Regard to Truth; and that all the Testimonies to Christianity taken from the Accomplishment of Prophecy, the Doctrine, Life, and Miracles of Christ, his Resurrection from the Dead, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, the miraculous Gifts and Powers conferr'd on the Apostles, the Success of the Gospel, and its rapid and extensive Pro-

gress in the World, notwithstanding the fierce Opposition it met with, together with the holy and happy Effects it has on the Lives and Tempers of Men : I say, Dare any Unbeliever appeal to the Heart-searching God, that he hath done all this, and yet cannot attain sufficient Satisfaction that the Scriptures are a divine Revelation ; but that he judges it much more reasonable to esteem them a *cunningly devised Fable*, and *Jesus Christ* himself an Impostor ?

I am willing to admit, that it would be contrary to the Nature of God, as a most just and beneficent Being, to require his Creatures to receive a Revelation as coming from him, without offering them at the same Time, sufficient Evidence of its divine Original ; but if he knows the Evidence to be sufficient, as in the Case now under Consideration he certainly does, and that it must be owing to the Perverseness of our Wills, and the Corruption of our Hearts if we reject it, let us remember we reject it at our Peril.

And this we shall find both in present Experience, and the final Issue of Things to be the real State of the Case ; that the Infidelity of Men arises not from their Judgment, but their Wills ; they do not want greater Evidence, but a more honest and upright Disposition of Mind. This is plainly implied in our Saviour's Words : *Ye believe not because ye are not of my Sheep (c)*, that is are not humble, meek, and teachable. Now the Gospel does not force its Blessings

(c) John x. 26.

Blessings upon the World, but treats us as free and reasonable Creatures, and therefore tho' its Light be ever so bright and glorious, *they whose Deeds are Evil, will love Darknes rather than Light, lest their Works should be made manifest and reprov'd.*

2dly, The Evidence is not only sufficient, but the Objects of this Faith are most worthy our Regard; and therefore if we give not the Attention which is due to their Importance, and which is requisite to render the Evidence attending them effectual to our Conviction, we must be unworthy the Salvation that is offer'd us.

There are some Things which would appear clear to us, if we duly attended to their Evidence, but which may not be worthy so close an Attention, as a careful Examination of the Evidence might require, which is some Excuse for our not believing them; but that is far from being the Case here. All the Objects of our Faith as Christians, which is necessary to our Salvation, are of the highest Importance, and deserving of all imaginable Attention and Regard.

Particularly the great Author of this Salvation, our *Lord Jesus Christ*, propounded by the Apostles to the Jailor, as the Object of his Faith, who in his personal Character is declared to be the Son of God, *(d) the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person, (e) exalted above all Principalities and*

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Powers,

(d) Heb i. 3.

(e) Eph. i. 21.

152 *Of the Connection between* Serm. VII.
Powers, (f) the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings ;
(g) who was in the Beginning with God, and (h)
thought it not Robbery to be equal with God.

For when the Father of Mercies had determined on the Delivery of the Sinners of Mankind from the Power of Sin and Death, in which the Honour of his own Perfections was so deeply interested, He chose to intrust none with so high a Commission but his own Son, that the Dignity of his Nature and Descent might conciliate and command the Esteem of those he came to save. Accordingly at the Time appointed in the divine Counsels, this glorious and exalted Person descended from the heavenly Mansions, tabernacled in human Clay, and lived and conversed amongst Men in their Form and Nature ; and as soon as he made his publick Appearance in the World, he opened his Father's Commission, produced his Credentials, and proclaimed and testified that he was sent of God, to be the Lord and Saviour of Men, by numerous and uncontested Miracles ; expressly declaring it to be the Will and Command of God, that all Men should believe on him, and embrace his Doctrine, and that whoever did so, *should not perish, but have everlasting Life.*

And what was the Doctrine he taught, but the most noble System of divine and heavenly Truth, infinitely honourable to the Perfections and Government of God, and most plain and intelligible, useful and beneficial to Men,
suited

(f) Rev. xvii. 14. (g) John i. 2. (h) Phil. ii. 6.

sued to relieve them under their Fears and Burthens, to dispel their Darknes and Ignorance, to purify them from their Corruption and Defilement, and to raise them to the Hope of a glorious and blessed Immortality? and that he might act up to his Character as *Captain of their Salvation*, he trod himself the Path in which he expected them to follow; shewed them by his own great Example how to conquer the Difficulties they might be likely to meet with in their Way to Heaven; and required them, under all the Discouragements of their Christian Course, to fix their Eye upon him, as the (i) *Author and Finisher of their Faith, who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, till he was sat down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God.* And as the utmost Effort and Exertion of his own infinite Compassion and Love, laid down his Life, that he might *redeem them to God by his Blood, and open a new and a living Way for them into the holiest of All.* After which he entered into Heaven as their Forerunner, receiv'd the Honours that were the just Reward of his Victory and Triumph, leaving this divine Encouragement to all his faithful Disciples, *In the World ye shall have Tribulation, but be of good Cheer, I have overcome the World* (k).

And now, Sirs, What Character ever appeared among Men, that deserved universal Attention and Regard if this does not? Here is the highest Dignity, and the most exalted Office,
united

(i) Heb. xii. 2. (k) John xvi. 35.

united in the same Person, who comes on the most wondrous as well as gracious Design, in which our everlasting Welfare is concerned, and who calls upon us to examine his Testimonials; and can Carelessness and Inattention, a Contempt and Disregard of the Call be innocent and justifiable? May not God justly expect, that the Redeemer's Person and Character, his Doctrine and Example, his Life and Death, his Resurrection and Ascension, should take off our Thoughts for a while from this vain World, that we may consider whether we are to treat him as a Magician and Impostor, or the Son of God and Saviour of Men? Shall we by our Coldness and Neglect, adopt the Language of the unclean Spirit, and say, *What have we to do with thee Jesus thou Son of the most high God (1)*, and yet pretend to vindicate our Conduct? Or is it not becoming the Majesty and Mercy of God, to punish so high an Indignity offered to his own Son invested with so important a Commission, and executing it in a Manner so much to our Benefit and Advantage?

And can *Infidelity* under such Circumstances as these then arise from any thing but the most shameful Stupidity and Obstinacy? What can raise and excite our Faith and Love, our Humility and Gratitude, and all those ingenuous Resentments of Mind, that become Creatures infinitely obliged, if such wondrous Condescension and Mercy fail of doing it? The
Writer

(1) Mark v. 7.

Writer to the *Hebrews* has therefore very justly represented the Danger of a Rejection of Christ, both on Account of the Evidence and Importance of his Commission. (m) *If (says he) the Word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience receiv'd a just Recompence of Reward, How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirm'd unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them Witness both with Signs and Wonders, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his own Will.* But,

3dly, *Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ*, or Faith in the Gospel, is connected with Salvation, because it is in its own Nature absolutely necessary to qualify us to partake of the Gospel Salvation.

If the Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Revelation be sufficient to convince every unprejudiced Mind, as most assuredly it is; and if its Contents are of such vast Importance as to render our Disregard of them utterly inexcusable, as most undoubtedly they are; from whence can such Disbelief and Inattention proceed but from that Alienation of Heart from God, which it is the professed Design of Christ's coming into the World to remove; and in the Removal of which, one Branch of the Salvation wrought out by him consists? What Pretence then can we make to everlasting Salvation, whilst we are destitute of that Disposition of Mind which

(m) Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4.

is absolutely necessary for enjoying it? And surely no Man will deny, that whilst we continue in a State of Disaffection to God, and are Enemies to him in our Minds by wicked Works, we are unqualified for the Enjoyment of his immediate Presence. Further,

Whilst destitute of Faith in Christ, we cannot approach or apply to God for Pardon and Mercy in the Way that the Gospel prescribes; for we shall never draw nigh to God in his Name, till we credit his Commission, or think of making use of his Mediation on any Occasion, unless we esteem him authorized and appointed of God to the Office of a Mediator.

The Gospel is very properly and emphatically called *the Grace of God bringing Salvation*, as it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World, whilst we are looking for the blessed Hope and glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ (n). But it cannot bring Salvation, if it does not thus teach and instruct us. And how can it be said to teach and instruct us, whilst we do not believe it? And what are the grand Motives by which these Instructions are to be enforced and fastened on our Minds, but the Expectation of the Appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ? And yet what Foundation have we for such an Expectation, if we disbelieve the Gospel? Men may pretend, that the Light of Nature is sufficient to satisfy us of a Judg-

(n) Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13.

ment to come, and a State of everlasting Recompences ; but it has never been found in Experience to give the World such a Satisfaction, as to engage them to *deny Ungodliness*. Whereas nothing can be a more cogent and powerful Motive to every Branch of pure and undefiled Religion, than the firm and unquestionable Assurance of the Appearance of the great God, and of our meeting that divine and compassionate Saviour of Men, *who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works* (o).

Accordingly we find Faith with the highest Reason represented as the principle of all Christian Grace and Virtue, and are required to (p) add *them* as a Superstructure to *that* as a Foundation. And indeed what can raise more high or adoring Apprehensions in our Minds of the Perfections of God, than the display of his Justice and Mercy in the Appointment of such a Saviour ? What can kindle so bright a Flame of Gratitude and Joy in the human Heart, as the Redeemer's Dignity and Philanthropy ? Where do we see the malignant Nature of Sin in such odious Colours as by taking a View of his Cross, or looking down into his Tomb ? What Representation of the *Vanity* of the World so convincing as his Contempt of it ? what Evidence of its Wickedness so affecting as his Crucifixion ? Where shall we go to learn Patience and Meekness, if we learn them not of him, who

(o) Tit. ii. 14. (p) 2 Pet. i. 3.

who bore to be reviled and spit upon, and scourged and pierced, without one murmuring Word, or one repining Thought? Or what Disciple of his can indulge to Resentment or Revenge with that Prayer of our Saviour for his Murderers, warm at his Heart, *Father forgive them, they know not what they do!*

And now if *Faith*, or *believing in the Lord Jesus Christ* is really fundamental to our learning such Lessons as these, is it not essential to Salvation? And does not that Impenitence and Perverseness that rejects him, justly deserve the Sentence he himself has pronounced, *Unless ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your Sins*, which indeed is only the natural and necessary Consequence of such incurable Infidelity.

And now to apply the Subject:

I will not make any Apology for this Method of preaching, how much soever it may be thought to need it: If it be said that Faith in Christ is an old fashioned Topcick, I own it: However, that is not our Honour, but our Reproach; and therefore I chuse to infer,

1st, That the right Understanding, and serious Consideration of the Scripture Doctrine of Faith in Christ, is of great Importance, both to Ministers and People.

If Faith in our Lord *Jesns Christ* was what the Apostle recommended to the Jailor as necessary to his Salvation, nay as the Sum and Substance of every Thing that was necessary to it, let us not be ashamed to preach, and I hope
Christians

Christians *you* will not be offended at our Preaching, according to his Model.

But then let us take care to represent it in its true Light; not as a Notion in the Head, not merely as an Act of the Understanding, but as a good Disposition of Heart, desirous of attending to, receiving and embracing the Lord *Jesus Christ* in all his Characters, of obeying his Commands, and imitating his Example, as ever we hoped to be saved by him. Let us remember it is a Spring and Principle of divine Life in the Soul; that it is designed to support and cherish, to animate and invigorate all other Christian Graces and Virtues. And sure I am, that all moral Duties have the most stable and lasting Foundation, when they are built upon a Belief of the great Doctrines of Christianity, and are most likely to be regarded, when recommended on Christian Principles, and enforced by the Christian Motives.

On the other Hand, Do *you* beware of censuring such Ministers as *legal* Preachers, who in their Discourses are labouring to illustrate and recommend the various Branches of the Christian Temper and Life, remembering that these are of the Essence of a true *Gospel Evangelical* Faith, that they are the Things of all others, which we are most apt to fail in, and yet which we are highly concerned not to fail in. And let us not be offended when we see Ministers have a Zeal for Christ, and Love for Souls, if the Terms and Phrases that are most accept-

acceptable to us, should not be made use of by them, in treating either of the great Doctrines or Duties of Christianity; for where can there be a greater Variety or Latitude of Expression, than in the Language of St. *Paul* and St. *James*, when speaking of the Point of *Justification*? Yet it is plain they really meant the very same Thing; and when St. *Paul*, that known Champion of the sovereign and distinguishing Mercy and Grace of God, was sent for by *Felix* to preach to him *the Faith of Christ, he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and a Judgment to come* (q); so that Persons who are offended with Discourses on such Subjects, would undoubtedly have been offended with the preaching of St. *Paul* himself. But,

2dly, Let what has been said excite in us the most solicitous Concern for *our own* Salvation.

In order to this, Beware of Infidelity, of treating Faith in Christ as a needless and unnecessary Thing. This is the reigning Vice and will be the Ruin of the present Age; natural Religion is thought to be sufficient for Salvation, and therefore the use of the Gospel is intirely superseded. Now supposing for Argument Sake, that the main Branches of our Duty are discernible by natural Light in such a Nation as this, yet are they so in Nations where the Gospel never came? Have not the Deists amongst us settled and adjusted, refined and improved their Notions of Morality by the Christian Revelation?

(q) Acts xxiv. 25.

tion? And is it grateful or honourable in them to reject it, after receiving so great a Benefit from it? But whatever *Notions* of Morality *Deists* may pretend to have, is it visible in Experience, that there are any Number of them (I believe I might say any of them) that conscientiously regard the Duties of the first and second Table, after they have renounced Christianity? Do they regularly and uniformly pay that Homage and Worship that is due to God, as their Creator and Lord, reverence his Name and Authority, and practise that strict Temperance, Righteousness, Benevolence and Charity, which is enjoined by the Doctrine of Christ? Have they the same Apprehensions of the odious Nature and dreadful Consequences of Sin, the same assured Expectation of a future approaching Judgment, as a thorough confirmed Christian has? Nay is it not evident, that Men generally run the utmost Lengths of Licentiousness and Immorality, when they once get rid of the Restraints they are laid under by the Christian Religion?

But if we could suppose our Obedience to the moral Law ever so perfect, yet if God has appointed, we should approach him, and expect Mercy and Grace from him only in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, and has given us undeniable Evidence of such Appointment; how shall we answer it to him, or how can we hope for Acceptance, if we approach him in any other Way? As we have forfeited all just Claim to his Favour and everlasting

Salvation, by our manifold Transgressions, he may certainly dispense his Mercy upon such Terms, as he judges most honourable to his own infinite Perfections, and it ill becomes Us to be *wise above what is written*; but if we are truly sensible of the vast Weight and Importance of our eternal Salvation, we shall humbly and thankfully receive it on these Terms, especially as we are assured it will be esteemed a high Affront of the divine Wisdom and Mercy if we do not, and be repented accordingly: *For if he that despised Moses's Law died without Mercy under two or three Witnesses, of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and hath done Despite unto the Spirit of Grace (r) ?*

As therefore thou knowest thyself to be a Sinner, and desirest everlasting Salvation, and to escape everlasting Destruction, *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that thou mayst be saved.* Remember the Time is hastening towards thee, when thou wilt stand on the Confines of the unseen World, as the trembling Jailor did, not perhaps under an Apprehension of being swallowed up by an Earthquake, but in the vast Abyss of Eternity, and wilt thou defer the Enquiry he then made under so much Consternation and Astonishment, *(Sirs, what must I do to be saved!)* till that awful Moment? It is pro-

(r) Heb. x. 28, 29.

probable the Jailor never had an Opportunity before, of being instructed in the Faith of Christ, and of humbly applying to God for Pardon and Forgiveness thro' him; but how many of this Kind hast thou had, and neglected and despised? Tremble at the Thought of thy lost Opportunities, and *awake thou that sleepest, arise from the Dead, and Christ shall give thee Light.*

And let those of us, who profess ourselves Believers in Christ, see that we adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things, clear up to our own Minds the reality of our Faith, by bringing forth the excellent Fruits of it, that so we may not stagger at any of the Promises of God through Unbelief, but may be strong in Faith, giving Glory to God; may discharge every Duty and Support under every Burthen of Life, *as seeing him who is invisible, and who hath promised to keep us by his mighty Power through Faith unto everlasting Salvation.*





S E R M O N VIII.

The wisdom of worldly Men, a
Reproof to that of good Men.



LUKE xvi. 8.

*For the Children of this World, are in
their Generation wiser than the
Children of Light.*



THESE Words are a Reflection made by our Blessed Lord, upon a Parable which he had just delivered with a View to exemplify the greater Sagacity and Prudence of worldly Men, in the Prosecution of their Temporal Interests, than is usually observed in good Men, with Regard to their eternal Happiness.

The Parable is this : A certain Steward was accused of embezzling his Lord's Estate ; and being conscious of his Guilt, begins to consider with himself, what was best for him to do

do in his present Circumstances: At last he concluded to shew some Acts of Generosity and Favour to his Lord's Debtors whilst he remain'd in his Office, which might be considered as a kind of Obligation by them, to shew Kindness to him when he should be turn'd out of it. Accordingly he calls them together, and remits to them a considerable Part of their respective Debts, giving them a full Discharge for the Whole. This Policy of the Steward coming to his Lord's Ears, *he commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely*, ver. 1. i. e. however he might blame the Dishonesty of the Man, he could not help commending the Care he was taking to provide for himself; for unjustifiable as his Conduct was, it was suitable enough to his Character, and shew'd him to be a Man of Art and Forecast. This injur'd Lord found his Steward ingenious though unjust, does not approve the Action itself, only admires his Contrivance, and judg'd him on different Accounts to be at once worthy of Blame and Praise.

Our Saviour's Inference from it is this: That in the general Men of the World are more wise and politick than Men of Religion, in the Pursuit of their respective Interests. *The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.*

This Reflection carries in it very important Instruction and Reproof. The Instruction is, that good Men should in all Reason be as careful and provident for their Souls, as wicked

Men are for their Bodies; and the Reproof or Accusation brought against them is, that they are not so. However unreasonable or unjustifiable it be, it is a Truth too obvious to be denied, that good Men in the Care of their spiritual, come far short of worldly-minded Men in their Diligence for their secular Interests; and notwithstanding the infinite Difference there is in the Nature and Excellency of the Objects of their respective Pursuit, the latter are oftentimes all Zeal and Fire, while the former are languid and indolent.

For the farther Illustration and Improvement of this Observation, I propose

(I.) To inquire who are to be understood by the *Children of this World*, and who by the *Children of Light*.

(II.) In what Respects the Children of this World may be said to be wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light.

(III.) I shall illustrate the Truth of this Observation in some particular Instances.

(I.) I am to inquire who are to be understood by the *Children of this World*, and who by the *Children of Light*.

Now here we must observe, that the Word *Children* beside the common Acceptation of it, when it signifies the immediate Natural Offspring of Parents, is in the Language of Scripture used in a figurative Sense to denote

The Disciples or Followers of any particular Person, whose Doctrines they embrace and
whom

whom they imitate in their Dispositions and Manners: Thus good Men who have *Abraham's Faith*, are called *the Children of Abraham*, and wicked Men *the Children of the Devil*. And also

To denote those who are strongly addicted or subject to any particular Habit of the Mind. Thus again good Men are called *the Children of Wisdom*, Luke vii. 35; and wicked Men *the Children of Iniquity*, Hof. x. 9.

Now in both these Respects may worldly-minded Men be called *the Children of this World*, as they imitate and follow the Customs, are addicted and enslaved to the Pleasures, and live in a Conformity to the Maxims of the World; They choose their Portion in this Life, and make it apparent that the getting and keeping, possessing and improving, using and enjoying earthly Treasures is their chief End and Happiness. The World is their Idol; To this they bow down and pay their Devotion; different Persons among them may have different Tastes, engage in different Pursuits, especially at various Times, or in the several Stages of Life; but *the Children of this World* do All universally affect the World, press after it, prefer it to all other Objects, and especially shew themselves determin'd in its Favour, when the invisible World is set in Competition. It is in *this World* only they discern Beauty and Excellence; its Lustre dazzles their Eyes, its Wealth attracts their Desires, its Honours fire their Ambition, and its Pleasures

tures captivate their Hearts. Here they are furnished with all the Materials of their Delight, and day and night Fancy is on the Rack, to render them more grateful and entertaining; All their Joys are gathered from the Surface, or extracted from the Fruits, or dug out of the Bowels of the Earth. The Company, the Profits, the Pleasures, and Customs of this vain World, are all they know, and chuse to know. Here they confine their Views and centre their Hopes, and could they have their Wish, would spend their Eternity. — Such are the *Children of this World*.

Let us now consider who are the *Children of Light*.

The Word *Light* in Scripture is frequently used in a figurative Sense, sometimes to denote *Knowledge*, which is to the Eye of the Mind, the same as *Light* is to the Eye of the Body, sometimes to denote the Means of Knowledge, namely, Reason and Revelation; and sometimes the Effects and Fruits of it, which are Truth and Happiness. Hence they are called the *Children of Light*, who follow after true Knowledge, who improve the Means of it, and who by the Assistance of their own Reason, and the Word of God, form a right Judgment of their Duty and Interest, and act in Conformity to such a Judgment.

As Mankind are unhappily involv'd in a common Apostacy, and *Satan* (the Head of it) founds his Dominion in Darkness, it pleased God of his infinite Mercy to us to overthrow
his

his Dominion, by causing the Day-spring from on High to visit us. The first Dawnings of this day of Light and Grace are of antient Date; the full Meridian of it was at the Appearance of *Christ*; who therefore emphatically styles himself *the Light of the World*, declaring that *he that followeth him shall not walk in Darknes, but shall have the Light of Life* (b). He is that *Son of Righteousness which is risen upon the World with healing under his Wings* (c), who was foretold as a *Light to lighten the Gentiles* (d); as a *Light shining in a dark Place* (e), and as the *true Light that lighteneth every Man that cometh into the World* (f).

Hence all those may be stiled the *Children of Light*, who enjoy the Benefit and Blessing of the Gospel Institution, and profess Faith in its divine Author. Therefore saith the Apostle, 1 Thess. v. 4—6. *Ye Brethren, are not in Darknes, that that Day should overtake you as a Thief; ye are all the Children of Light, and the Children of the Day; we are not of the Night, nor of Darknes. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober. But more especially the faithful Followers of Christ, who under the Guidance of his Spirit, and the Instructions of his Word, are led into the right Knowledge of God and themselves, who make a just Estimate of their true State and their proper Happiness; and accordingly guard their Tempers, and determine their Actions as those*

(b) John viii. 12. (c) Mal. iv. 2. (d) Luke ii. 32.
(e) 2 Pet. i. 19. (f) John i. 9.

those who are animated with the Views and called to the Hopes of Life eternal, may be eminently stiled the *Children of Light*.

(II.) Our next Enquiry is, in what Respects the Children of this World, may be said to be *wiser in their Generation* than the Children of Light. And

(1.) Our Lord does not mean to declare, that the Children of this World are really and truly wise, much less wiser than the Children of Light in Matters that are most worthy their Regard, and of principal Consideration.

No, He that hath an immortal Soul, and neglects it to gratify the Appetites of a perishing Body; He who pleases himself, tho' he provokes his Maker and his Judge, is not wise. A *Lover of Pleasure more than a Lover of God*, who is govern'd by Sense more than Reason, by Passion more than Conscience, preferring this World to Heaven, and a Life of Sin to a Life of Virtue, is not truly wise. Would our Saviour compliment those Persons with a Character for Wisdom, who were Subjects of that Kingdom he came to destroy? and who lived in those Practices, his Precepts forbid and his Example reproved?

They may be called wise, *i. e.* shrewd, cunning Men, and as such be envy'd by others; nay may be really so with regard to their temporal Interest and the Means of securing present Advantages. But they are entire Strangers to *sterling* Wisdom; their Hearts are not en-
rich'd

rich'd with its Treasures, nor their Conversation govern'd by its Maxims. Notwithstanding all their Fame for Wisdom, Folly is bound up in their Hearts, most shameful, dangerous, destructive Folly, as different from genuine Wisdom, as Darknefs is from Light.

(2.) The Proposition in the Text is not to be taken universally or without Exception.

Our Lord does not mean that what is here observed concerning the *Children of this World*, and the *Children of Light*, is equally true of every one that bears either of those Characters, only that it is generally the Case; for the Truth whereof we need only appeal to common Experience.

Happy indeed it is, that we can discern any Exceptions to this general Rule; that we observe some of the Children of Light adorn their Character, act worthy their Privileges and Prospects, and reflect the Beauty and Beams of Truth and Wisdom with Lustre around them, who are not only sober and upright, pious and benevolent, and stedfast in their Profession, but active and exemplary in their Christian Course, *servant in Spirit*, unwearied in the *Labours of Love*, and *abounding in the Work of the Lord*, more vigorous and animated in their Progress towards a better World than even some wicked Men are in the Pursuit and Enjoyment of this; for there are Drones among the Children of this World, as well as among the Children of Light, and good Men who are more eminent

ment in the exercise of their Graces, than some of the Wicked are in indulging their Vices.

But then this is an Observation too rare and uncommon: It ought to be universally the Case, whereas alas! shameful and unreasonable as it is, (considering the infinite Difference of Things,) we do generally find on the whole, that wicked Men out-strip the Good in their Zeal for and Regard to the Objects of their Pursuit; that these are more lively and expert in promoting their secular Advantage, than those in securing their eternal Interest, *the Children of this World being wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light.*

(3.) Neither does our Lord mean to be understood, that a due Regard to our secular Affairs is incompatible with a proper Care of our Souls, or that it is impossible for a Man to be duly wise for both Worlds at the same Time.

These Interests are not ordinarily, at least not necessarily inconsistent: What hinders that a Man of Business should be a Man of Religion, or a Child of Light prudent and active in his secular Calling? Religion gives no Encouragement to any kind of Idleness and Sloth; on the contrary, discountenances reproves and condemns it; and the same Principles and Motives urge us to be diligent in the Duties both of Life and Religion, and to take a proportionable Care of our present and future Interests, as we stand related to this and the other World.

'Tis true, Men cannot be the Children of this World, and the Children of Light, they cannot

cannot *serve God and Mammon*, or have their Hearts set upon Virtue and Vice, at the same Time; one of these contrary Attractions will prevail, whence results every Man's proper Character; which however it may be concealed from Men, is known to the all-seeing God; and the visible Preference, we give to either of these when in Competition discovers our Character to others. Yet still Religion does not forbid our taking a reasonable Care for the Things of this World, though it allows not our Hearts to be set on them. It does not oblige us to come a whit behind others in Ingenuity, Application and Fore-thought in worldly Business; for *Wisdom* is described in Scripture, as having in *her right hand Length of Days, and in her left hand, Riches and Honour* (g).

But (4.) What our Lord principally intends is, that this Observation is *generally* true, that wicked Men are more provident and active in obtaining and securing their present and temporal, than good Men are about their future and eternal Interests; in which Sense the Proposition in the Text hath been already sufficiently explained.

I therefore proceed to what I principally proposed, *viz.*

(III.) To illustrate the Truth of this Proposition in several particular Instances.

Now I intend to specify some Marks of Policy and Penetration very visible in the Care which

which the Children of this World take in their secular Affairs, and to propose each of them as a Rule by which to examine our Conduct as Christians, wherein we shall fully see the sad Truth and Propriety of our Saviour's Observation, and what need we have to be sent to worldly Men to learn Wisdom. And,

(1.) The Men of this World understand their own Interest, and the best Methods to improve it.

They take Care of the *main Chance*, as they call it, and whatever else they neglect, will be sure to keep that in their Eye; they are solicitous to improve all Advantages and every Method of Gain. To this End they cast about in their own Minds, and get the best Information they can from others, and endeavour to establish the Measures by which they proceed on the highest Degrees of Probability: And as they know Mistakes are possible, and Hazards various, they take Care to guard against them as much as they can, keeping their chief End always in View, and avoiding all Engagements that are inconsistent with their leading Principle.

And now, Christians, let us lay our Hands upon our Hearts, and impartially examine ourselves: Have we acted such a Part for our Souls? Do we duly understand and consider our chief End, and keep it steady in our View? Have we laid it down as a fundamental Maxim that our Happiness lies above, and that our Lives ought to be a continual uniform tendency towards God and Heaven? And does this Prin-

Principle govern and determine us when any worldly Gratifications are brought in Competition? Are we intent upon glorifying God, in hopes of enjoying him for ever? Are we as inflexibly bent upon this, as the Children of the World are upon gaining its Advantages and Profits? Are our Hearts effectually touch'd with the Love of God?—then that Love will attract them; they will turn and point to him as the Needle to the Pole; and like that, be trembling and restless till they center in him. Do we mind spiritual Things with the same invariable Constancy, as worldly Men do temporal ones? Are our Resolutions as stedfastly fixed, and our Hearts as firmly engaged to improve our spiritual Interests, as theirs are to improve those that are secular? In short, do we seek Heaven with the same bent of Mind they seek the World, and prize and pursue everlasting Happiness, as resolutely as they do present Happiness? If not, then in this Respect the *Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.*

(2.) The Children of this World prosecute their Interest with indefatigable Application and Industry.

They are not only prudent, but diligent, and take Care and Pains to execute, what they take Time and Thought to contrive, in which they deny themselves the Diversions, and oftentimes the Refreshments of Life. You find them wholly intent upon the Execution of the Schemes they have projected; for which they

they rise up early, sit up late, and eat the Bread of Carefulness.

And now do we use the same Diligence and Application in Religion? Sure we ought to do it, because we have nobler and more illustrious Objects in View. Nothing can be done without Labour, in any Course or Employment: In War, in Traffick, in Learning, and Trade, in all or any of these, no Progress without Pains, and this your Men of the World know very well: And is Religion the only Thing that does not require, or that does not deserve them? Do we expect to be wafted to Heaven in pleasing Dreams (*i*)? or make any Advances in the Ways of Virtue by sitting still? or overcome the Temptations that assault us by soft Indulgence? Does a *Warfare*, a *Race*, a *Pilgrimage* imply no Labour? Can we conquer without Fighting, win without Running, or arrive at our Journey's End without Travelling?—Diligence is the only Way to Eminence in every Profession: And do we expect to be eminent and yet idle Christians? Does every thing demand and deserve Care and Diligence but our Souls, and everlasting Happiness? If our Religion costs us nothing, it is worth nothing.

How can lazy, lukewarm, slothful, indolent Christians think of this without Blushing? And with what Face can they read those solemn Remonstrances and Exhortations of Scripture,

(*i*) *Non est ex terris mollis ad Astra via.*

Scripture, *Go to the Ant thou Sluggard, consider her Ways and be wise (k); strive to enter in at the straight Gate (l); work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling (m); be not weary in well doing (n); be not slothful in Business, but fervent in Spirit while serving the Lord (o); so run that you may obtain (p); make your Calling and Election sure (q); be diligent to be found of him in Peace (r);* I say with what Face can the lazy Christian read these Scriptures, or hear them read, and yet pretend there is no need of Self-denial or Labour in Religion, to establish his Hopes or secure his Happiness?

Shall the Merchant be more attentive to send his Goods in time to a proper Market, than I am to secure immortal Treasures? Shall the Husbandman bestow more Labour to cultivate his Ground, than I to improve and enrich my Soul? Shall a common Artificer be more diligent and provident in the Things of this Life, than I in the Things of another Life? More solicitous for the *Meat that perisheth, than I for that which endureth to everlasting Life (s);* Or if I am engaged in one of these Occupations, does not mine own Industry reprove me, and the Care I take of my worldly, upbraid my Negligence in my spiritual Concerns? Were I as slothful and heavy and indifferent in Trade as I am in Religion, what would others think of me? Should I not soon forfeit the Favour of my Friends and lose my Credit in the
N World?

(k) Prov. vi. 6. (l) Luke xiii. 24. (m) Phil. ii. 12.

(n) Gal. vi. 9. (o) Rom. xii. 2. (p) 1. Cor. ix. 24.

(q) 2 Pet. i. 10. (r) 2 Pet. iii. 14. (s) John vi. 47.

World? And whilst I am so indolent and careless in Religion, what do God and my Fellow-christians think of me? am I in no Danger of losing their Favour and Friendship? — Let these obvious Thoughts be often admitted, and have their due Weight upon us, and I am persuaded they will make us ashamed of that Dulness and Inactivity, which we too inconsiderately indulge in the Affairs of our Souls and Eternity.

(3.) The wise Men of this World take care to make the most of their Opportunities.

They are not only in general diligent for their Interest at all Times, but are more especially so at some Times, when they have the fairest Opportunities of advancing it. They well know the Importance of such a Conduct, that the redeeming or neglecting an Opportunity, may possibly be the making or ruining of them, they are sensible Opportunities are not frequent, and if lost may never return. And they have a Maxim among them (upon what just Principles it is founded I know not) that every Man hath at least *one* such Opportunity in his Life, so that if he does not advance himself it is his own Fault. However this be, it is certain there is scarce any thing in which Men discover greater Sagacity, than in discerning and improving Opportunities favourable to the Interests they pursue, and the Designs they propose, and that the Success and Prosperity of their Undertakings depends very much on this.

Now

Now do we Christians observe this prudent Piece of Conduct in our Journey towards Heaven? Are we as attentive to embrace favourable Opportunities to preserve and promote in our Souls the Life and Power of Religion? Providence hath bestow'd upon us not only one, but many special Seasons, that are most friendly to our best Interests. Youth is such, when the Heart is tender and susceptible of good Impressions, and free from those evil Habits and corrupt Prejudices, which often take Possession of it afterwards. — Health is another favourable Season of the same kind, when our Strength is firm and our Spirits lively, and disposed to Action and Exercise. And so is a time of Peace and Prosperity, and of Gospel Grace and Liberty; when our Teachers are not driven into Corners, when the *Word of God* is not bound; when the Waters of the Sanctuary flow plentifully, and we have *Line upon Line, and Precept upon Precept*; when our Sabbaths and Sacraments return without Interruption, and we enjoy the Means and Ordinances of Grace and Salvation to the richest Advantage. If then we delight in such Opportunities, and improve them, by abounding in Devotion and the *Fruits of Righteousness*, it is a Sign the Divine Life is in it's Vigour, and that our Souls are in a fair and flourishing State. But if we are soon tired of these holy Exercises, and begin to loath our spiritual Provision, grow remiss in Duty, and dispos'd to admit of every Pretence to neglect it, ill

Symptoms are upon us, which threaten Declension and Apostacy.

Well, how stands this Affair with us? Let Conscience speak. Are we or are we not as diligent to embrace Opportunities for the Interest of our Souls, as worldly Men are to embrace Opportunities for their secular Advantage? Do we as duly and as diligently repair to the Throne of Grace as the Merchant does to the 'Change? Do we improve our Sabbaths as carefully as the Tradesman does his Markets? And attend on Sacraments and special Opportunities of religious Worship, with as much Readiness Assiduity and Zeal, as the Husbandman does on Fairs and Sales in Hopes of Gain? and make as much of our spiritual Privileges, as worldly Men do of their temporal ones? If not --- *the Children of this World are in this respect wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light?*

(4.) They are cautious of running any great Hazard in Cases of considerable Consequence.

They care not to embark all on one Bottom, or trust People they do not know, or employ those who are either ignorant and unskilful, or indolent and slothful. They keep in Memory the Miscarriages of others, and endeavour to steer clear off those Rocks on which they see others have split. Such Caution is especially observ'd in Matters of Importance and it is doubtless a Precept of Wisdom.

O! that Men were but as wise for their Souls! as cautious in Matters of everlasting Importance! But here it is strange to see and sad to say, what

what dangerous Risks they run, what dreadful Leaps they take, how thoughtless they are of Consequences, and how desperately they stake their Souls for Trifles! And these the very Men too, than whom none perhaps are more cautious and fearful of the least Danger and Detriment to their worldly Interest; as if the Loss of the Soul was nothing, or the least temporal Disappointment more to be dreaded than everlasting Destruction!

And it is to be feared, that even the *Children of Light*, are not altogether free from the Charge of too great Precipitance and Temerity in Religion: Many of them want much of that wise Caution in their spiritual Concerns, which *the Children of the World* set them an Example of. The same Wariness in Religion, as is commonly us'd by Men of Business in things of a secular Nature, would be exceedingly serviceable to good Men, amongst others in the following Instances.

It would prevent many Errors. For to what is it owing but want of Caution, that some even good Men not only imbibe but zealously maintain very erroneous Principles, as Articles of important Truth? Nay place Religion in things injurious to it, and think they honour God by imposing on the Faith of others, Sentiments and Notions dishonourable to his Name, and contrary to his Word: All which would easily have been prevented by a wise and timely Caution, had they suspended their Judgment 'till they had carefully examined, or paid a
 N 3 greater

greater Deference to the Evidence of Reason, and the Authority of Scripture, than to the Decisions of weak and fallible Men; which Wisdom and Caution would certainly have directed them to do. Again,

It would prevent many Indiscretions and Imprudences in their personal Conduct and Behaviour, to the Blemish of their Characters, the wounding the Peace of their Souls, and the Dishonour of the Christian Interest. It would ward off various Temptations, and disarm many more. To instance only in one Case; a Man of a hasty Spirit, who is sensible what Occasions are most apt to ruffle him, how much might he provide for the Peace of his Mind, by the Use of Caution to avoid such Occasions, which perhaps are his most dangerous Temptations? Further,

It would guard us against Extremes in every thing, and especially against being fond of Extremes, and would keep us from running to the utmost Extent of our Christian Liberty, or going to the very Verge of what is lawful, which naturally emboldens us to venture on what is sinful.

(5.) Men of the World are very exact and punctual in their Accounts.

They keep their Books with great Exactness and Care, are attentive to prevent Mistakes or rectify them early. They frequently consult, carefully examine, and at stated Times adjust and balance them, that they may know whether they gain or lose; and if they gain, what are their

their yearly Profits ; and how they ought to proceed so as to be still on the improving Hand.

And now are we thus careful to observe and examine how Accounts stand between God and our Souls ? Do we keep and inspect our Hearts with as much Constancy and Faithfulness as the Tradesman does his Books, to see whether we go forward or backward, whether we gain or lose in the spiritual Life ? Self-Examination should be our daily Business, if we would know our true State, but should at sometimes be perform'd in a more deliberate and solemn Manner. --- ' What Stock of Knowledge and Experience have we been laying up against a time of Need ? Have we more deep and distinct Apprehensions of God and his Attributes, more affecting Views of Christ and his Love ? Are our Consciences more tender, our Lives more circumspect, and our Graces more lively than they were at such a Time ? Or are we grown more carnal, and more careless and indifferent in the Concerns of Religion ?' This will be a good Method to discover the Frame of our Hearts, clear up our Doubts, rectify our Errors, confirm our Hopes, and prepare us for the approaching Days of Darkness and Adversity.

And as the Man of Business is not only concern'd to keep his Accounts right in general, but calculates the Profits of every distinct Branch of his Trade, so a Christian in the Business of Self-Examination, should descend to the several Parts of his Conduct and Tem-

per, review his particular Actions, to see wherein he has excelled, and wherein he has failed of his Duty; and his various Graces, to see in which of them he advances, and in which he declines. A great Point of Prudence this, to be learn'd from the *Children of this World, who are often wiser in their Generation, than the Children of Light.*

(6.) Another Piece of Prudence observable is, their regular Method of Business.

They have stated Rules and Seasons for the Dispatch of its various Branches, which makes them proceed more smoothly and orderly, and prevents that Distraction Hurry and Confusion that would otherwise necessarily attend the transacting a Multiplicity of Affairs. --- And in this they are well worthy the Christian's Imitation. Our spiritual Affairs would be more prosperous and successful, were they conducted with Method and Regularity, and proper Times and Seasons duly observ'd.

Let us examine ourselves then on this Head. In what Order or Method do we proceed in our religious Transactions? Have we our stated Seasons of Devotion? Do we meditate divine Things at our Leisure, and see that Affairs of a different Nature and Concern do not possess us at once, which will entangle and confound our Minds; and that one Duty does not exclude or encroach on another, and that every one be perform'd in it's Season? The Want of which, however zealous we may be in Religion,

gion, will at once obstruct our Progress, and cast a Reproach on our Character.

(7.) Your Men of the World are not soon discourag'd, but under Disappointments and Difficulties summon their Resolution, collect their Strength, and proceed with double Care and Vigilance. Hence I have heard some Men in prosperous Circumstances impute their Success to the Disappointments they met with at their first setting out in the World, which whetted their Industry and increased their Caution.

Now are we thus wise for our Souls? It is to be fear'd we come as far short of their Wisdom in this Point as in any other. How apt are we to be dispirited at the Prospect of Opposition? to be discourag'd and *faint in our Way*? ready to give out, when at any time Satan hath unhappily *gain'd some Advantage over us*? and to imitate the Diffidence and Perverseness of the *Israelites*, who upon the View of Danger, entertain'd Thoughts of returning back to *Egypt*? But let us set the Recompence we hope for against the Difficulties we are call'd to encounter. Is not an immortal Crown worth contending for? Is not the *Praise that cometh from God* worth seeking through Hardships and Disappointments? What is the Use of our Patience Wisdom and Fortitude, but to be exerted on the most necessary and emergent Occasions? And can any Occasion require or deserve them more, than when we are call'd to submit to transient Inconveniences, in the Pursuit

Pursuit of immortal Glory? O that our Motives and Encouragements as Christians, which are so much nobler than those of worldly Men, might animate us at least with equal Zeal and Resolution!

(*Lastly.*) The Men of this World who are *wise in their Generation*, take care to provide for Contingences, and to lay up against a Time of Need.

The unjust Steward in the Text is a notable Instance of this Sagacity. — It is not certain what Turn Affairs may take, in what Straits or Exigencies they may be soon involv'd, what extraordinary Expences may be incurr'd through unforeseen Accidents; and they think it necessary to lay up something against a *rainy Day*, as they call it. — At least, they are sure old Age is advancing under the Feebleness and Languor and Pains of which they will be very unfit for the Fatigue and Cares of Business, and must be obliged to retire and leave it to others. Against this Time therefore they are very desirous of making a comfortable Provision, and it is certainly their Wisdom to do so.

Let us consider then, what Provision have we made for Futurity? What may befall us in our Passage through this World God only knows; what Pains, what Diseases, what Trials, what Crosses, Disappointments and Distress. The bitterest Ingredients in our Cup may lie at the Bottom. How necessary then is it to *watch and pray*, to be cautious and humble,

ble, diligently to improve the Prime and Vigour of our Lives? To have our Lamps trimm'd, and our Lights burning? To lay in good Stock of Christian Knowledge, Experience and Comfort? To converse much with the Precepts, the Hopes and the Promises of the Gospel? And often turn our Eyes from temporal to eternal Objects?

But suppose (what can hardly be suppos'd) an uninterrupted Scene of Tranquility through Life; yet will not Death soon overtake us? Is not our Dissolution sure and near, when God will *require our Souls* at our Hands? And is it nothing what Provision we make against this Extremity? Can we be too well fortify'd against the Terrors of that dreadful Hour? Do we think what it is to change Time for Eternity? Can we have too sure Evidence that our Souls are safe? And is it not worth the Care and Business of Life, to have solid Hope and Peace in Death?

To conclude, Let us learn, my Christian Friends, to be more concern'd about the one Thing needful, and give it the just Preference it deserves. Let those Words, *Give an Account of thy Stewardship*, be often in our Thoughts, and enter with due Weight into our Hearts, to keep them serious watchful and steady, amidst the Decoys and Temptations of a World full of busy Vanity, and to fix right Impressions upon them as their durable Guard and Stay.

If

If you say, ' Would you have us do nothing but mind Religion? Must we shut ourselves out from the World? Or carry Religion into our Compting-Houses, and to the Exchange?' I answer, you may carry a religious Temper with you thither, which will by no Means be a Hindrance, but an Honour and Ornament to you in your secular Engagements. — There is no Necessity that you shake Hands with the World, when you commence a Profelyte of Righteousness; but I would fain have you as wise in your Generation as the *Children of the World* are in their's. I would have you learn Wisdom of them, and use the same Sagacity and Circumspection they do, only with higher Views, and to a nobler End. — 'Tis true, an Estate is something, Business Usefulness Interest and Importance among Men, are something; but Vertue and Religion is something more, though very consistent with the former. Why should you not mind the principal Things in the principal Place? In the Affairs of the World you do so. Let not God and Heaven then be neglected for the Sake of an Estate. Be industrious in your Business, but be so in Religion too. As you believe the Christian Doctrine, make Conscience of the Christian Practice; act up to the Dignity of your Character as *Children of Light*; be wise for yourselves and for Eternity; follow Holiness; rest not in Names and Notions and external Things, but see that your Spirits are forming
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by a divine Faith for the Glory and Felicity of Heaven; and that whilst you are employ'd in the Affairs of the present World, you are gradually and uniformly tending towards Glory Honour and Immortality, in the joyful Views and Hopes of *Life Eternal!*





S E R M O N IX.

Of the Government of the Spirit.



PROV. XXV. 28.

He that hath no Rule over his own Spirit, is like a City broken down and without Walls.

THE Want of a right Government of the Spirit, was in the Judgment of *Solomon*, so great a Dishonour to the human Nature, that he could think of no apter or more significant Description of it, than the Similitude he uses in the Text, of a *City broken down and without Walls*, reduced to that Condition by a victorious Enemy, or the Madness of it's own Inhabitants, sack'd demolish'd and ruin'd; it's Strength and Power subdued, it's Beauty and Grandeur defaced, it's Treasures ransack'd and plunder'd, it's Inhabitants fled or murder'd, the Grief and Pity of it's Friends, and the Insult and Prey of it's Enemies.

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How strong and fine an Image this, of the Waste and Ravage made in the human Mind by the Tyranny of headstrong outrageous Passions, uncontroul'd by the Principles of Reason and Religion! An Infelicity so great and dreadful, that no Man can be too much upon his Guard against it; and therefore I hope to engage your Attention, whilst I represent and expose it and endeavour to fortify you against it by the following Enquiries.

(I.) Who are the Persons that are intended by the Description in the Text, or that have *no rule over their own Spirits?*

(II.) What a sad and deplorable Condition are such Persons in?

(III.) What are the principal Reasons that should induce us to labour after the right Government of our Spirits?

(IV.) What Encouragement have we to attempt the attaining this Mastery over ourselves? And

(V.) To what useful Purposes may this Subject be apply'd?

(I.) My first Enquiry is, who are the Persons that are included in the Description of the Text, or that have *no Rule over their Spirits?*

By a *Man's Spirit*, in common Discourse, as well as in all Writings sacred and profane, is generally understood either his *reasonable Soul*, or some ruling and predominant *Passion*: In
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the Text it seems more immediately to denote the Passion of *Anger*. But the Representation is equally just and beautiful, if apply'd to the Disgrace and Desolation brought upon the Mind, by the Dominion and Tyranny of any other ungovern'd Passion.

Under this Head therefore I might have considered at large a Variety of Characters, wherein some of the meaner Powers of Nature bear Rule, and destroy the Peace and Order resulting from their regular Subordination to the Dictates of the Understanding and Conscience. And altho' I think it will be more agreeable to *Solomon's* Intention, to consider principally the Passion of *Anger*, yet I can't refrain touching on some other prevailing Passions, that are a frequent Reproach and Disgrace to the human Nature.

And as on other Occasions none are fonder of being distinguish'd, and first taken Notice of, I shall here give Precedence to *the Vain and Giddy*.

These are the gay and feather'd Part of our Species, who are so well plum'd with their own Sense and Sufficiency, that one may as well speak to the Wind as to their Vanity, and as soon chain up the flying Clouds, as bring their light and volatile Spirits to serious Thought or manly Consideration. The unbounded Levity and Dissoluteness of their Tempers, renders them inattentive to every thing but Pleasure. Their Hearts and Heads and Tongues run continually on Company Diversions News and
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Dress; every gilded Toy attracts their Eye, and every splendid Trifle captivates their Heart.

Now, how allowable soever the Diversions of a leisure Hour are, nay how convenient and necessary it may be sometimes to relax and unbend the Mind, by inviting Chearfulness to become our Companion and Guest, to exhilarate our Hearts, and inviven our Table; yet surely Mirth should not be our constant Employment, we should not suffer all our Time to run waste, and redeem no Part of it for useful Thought and wise Reflection, because this is not only impious and profane, but weak and unmanly, and ought not to be indulg'd, as it can never be vindicated.

And if my Text carries a severe Reproof to People of this Complexion, it will convey a much juster one to the *Intemperate* and *Impure*; whose Heads are stored with unchaste Ideas, and whose Hearts burn with brutal Lusts, who not only overlook the Beauty and Benefit of Sobriety and Continence, and disregard the civil and sacred Ties which ought to guard the Peace and Order of Society, but break through the strong and repeated Cautions and Threatnings, suggested and denounced in the Scriptures against Lasciviousness and Excess; and how thick soever the Fence be that is set against them, will through the Impetuosity of their Passions leap over those reasonable Inclosures, though they are strongly fortify'd by the Authority of the most high God.

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Another Denomination of Men who have no Rule over their own Spirits, are the *Covetous*. To *covet*, signifies in general, only to desire more; and when its Object is really good, is a virtuous and commendable Disposition; yet in the common Acceptation of the Word it denotes an eager and insatiable Desire of earthly Things, particularly Riches, and taking that Delight and placing that Confidence in them, which is due to God alone; and then it is the Vice expressly forbidden in the tenth Commandment, and many other Places of Scripture, which represent it as the Source of Injustice Oppression and Cruelty, and so utterly exclusive of the Love of God in the Heart, as to render those who indulge it the Objects of his Abhorrence. *The Wicked boasteth of his Heart's Desire, and bleisseth the Covetous whom the Lord abhorreth.**

And though this Passion frustrates its own Intention, carries Pain and Infamy along with it, and is the never-failing Subject of general Ridicule, insomuch that Men think they can never censure or expose it enough, or make the Losses and Vexations of the Covetous the too frequent Subject of their Banter and Mirth; yet it is a Temper hardly ever subdued, because it increases with advancing Years, and when every other Object droops and fades, Gold still retains its Lustre; nay what is worst of all, it frequently meets with more favourable Quar-
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* Psal. x. 3.

ter amongst good Men than most other Vices of the Mind, and though branded in Scripture with the Guilt of Idolatry, yet are they often tempted to indulge it to the great Reproach of Religion, and their own Characters as Professors of it.

The *Envious* are likewise highly deserving to be exposed by the Metaphor of the Text, who repine at the Wealth Prosperity or Fame of others, and wish them to lose what they at the same time enjoy or labour to enjoy themselves; and *whose Eye is evil because God's is good*: Envy perhaps is the meanest and basest Quality of the humane Nature, transforms a Man into the Image of that malignant Being whose Character is distinguish'd by it, and is a Reproach and Punishment to those that harbour it, as it betrays a weak proud disappointed Spirit, preys upon the Heart, impairs the Health, and when discover'd, incurs universal Contempt, on both which Accounts *Solomon* emphatically calls it the *Rottenness of the Bones*.

But I pass over these Characters that I may have Time to dwell more largely on that which seems to be principally intended, that of *the Angry and Passionate*.

A Man that is under the Tyranny and lies at the Mercy of a violent and passionate Spirit, is of all others the most destitute of Self-Command, and for the Time his Passion rages as

void of Reason and Understanding and a Power of Self-Direction, as a Person seiz'd with Madness or intoxicated with Liquor, and the sad and shameful Desolation and Havock thereby made in the Mind, cannot be represented by a more striking Image than that in the Text, of a *City broken down and without Walls*; reduced to that deplorable and desolate Condition by the Infatuation of it's own Inhabitants, or the Inroad of a barbarous Enemy, so as to be at once an Object of Pity and Contempt, of Indignation and Insult.

But that we may be able to form a just and regular Conception of the Nature of this Passion of Anger, it will be necessary to attend to the following Observations. As

(1.) That Anger is often *Constitutional*, and its sudden Emotions in some Men owing to their natural Make and Frame. From the mere Temperament of their Bodies they are dispos'd to be more hot and cholerick than others. This is undoubtedly a very great Unhappiness and Disadvantage, and though it will hardly ever wholly justify excessive Anger, will in some Cases go a good Way to excuse it; and provided the Disposition be not indulged but carefully watched and vigorously oppos'd, may (it is to be hop'd) procure an easier Forgiveness both with God and Man. I wou'd further observe,

(2.) That it is not *always a Fault to be angry*. Anger is not in itself criminal, any more than any other Passion; what renders it so is the
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the wrong Direction and undue Degree of it. For as the Passions were planted in our Nature for wise and valuable Purposes, so this in particular has it's proper Use and End, and may upon certain Occasions be not only innocently but worthily exerted. Great Indiscretions and frontless Wickedness should excite it, Impudence and Ingratitude, Craft and Calumny deserve to feel it's Weight, and therefore if properly express'd on such Provocations, it is not only lawful but laudable, and may be a Means to prevent Sin or put it out of Countenance. And as Virtue and Goodness are often discountenanced or terrified by the Abuse of this Passion, why should not Vice be discourag'd by the seasonable Use of it? *Solomon* (than whom no Man ever made Observations on human Nature with more Accuracy and Penetration) tells us, that as *the North Wind driveth away Rain, so doth an angry Countenance a backbiting Tongue* (b). A Frown is well bestow'd when it puts Impiety or Impudence to the Blush.

That very Injunction of the Apostle, *Eph. iv. 26. Be ye angry and sin not*, supposes there may be Anger without Sin, otherwise he enjoins an Impossibility. But that which puts the Matter beyond all Dispute is the Example of our Saviour himself, who notwithstanding all the Gentleness and Meekness of his Lamb-like Nature, discover'd a just Resentment on certain Occasions, and particularly when he express'd his Indignation at the Hypocrisy and Pride of

the *Pharisees*. Now from both these Considerations together it appears,

(3.) That neither is it *always a Vertue not to be angry*, because this may be more owing to Constitution and Nature, than the Care a Man takes of his Spirit. He may have more Phlegm and less Fire in him than others, and may meet with fewer or smaller Provocations, which may be the Reason he is not so often or so highly exasperated as they ; and when this is the Case, it is his Felicity indeed but not his Virtue, for Virtue consists in resolutely opposing upon principle all Temptations to Sin, and persevering in that Opposition with a pure Conscience and a steadfast Mind.

Besides, it should be remember'd that such a phlegmatick dispassionate Temper has it's Disadvantages as well as an eager and cholerick one ; as the latter is apt to incline a Man to be angry when he ought not, so the former renders a Man indispos'd to be angry when he ought. However,

The greatest Danger by far lies on the other Side ; for though Anger may on some Occasions be lawful yet it is too frequently sinful, and is always so, when it is excited too soon or raised too high or continued too long, because in all these Cases it lays the Soul in that abject and defenceless State which is represented in the Text.

(1.) When it is *excited too soon*.

If we are soon angry it is a Sign we have *no Rule over our own Spirit*. Some are apt to swell

swell on a sudden, to fret and storm at Trifles, every Spark of Provocation sets them in a Blaze. This is their Weakness and Dishonour, highly unbecoming their Reason as Men, and their Profession as Christians, and always a Sign of a dissolute and untractable Mind. And therefore *Solomon* tells us that *he that is soon angry dealeth foolishly*, (c); and warns us *not to be hasty in our Spirits to be angry* (d); and to take heed how we contract a Friendship with such Persons, which seldom proves either comfortable or durable. *Make no Friendship* (says he) *with an angry Man, and with a furious Man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his Ways and get a Snare to thy Soul* (e). On the other Hand he recommends a patient forbearing Temper as reasonable and honourable, and a great Instance of Wisdom and Strength of Mind; *The Discretion of a Man deferreth his Anger, and it is his Glory to pass over a Transgression* (f), i. e. an Affront or an Injury.

(2.) Inordinate and outrageous Anger is certainly sinful, and of all Things most robs a Man of the Government of his Spirit, *when it is disproportion'd to the Occasion*, or excessive in the Degree of it.

We ought not indeed to be *easily provok'd*, but if this cannot be avoided, we ought however to be easily appeas'd; whereas on the contrary, if when once the unhallow'd Fire is lighted it is instantly blown into Rage, so as to

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prevent

(c) Prov. xiv. 17. (d) Eccl. vii. 9. (e) Prov. xxii. 24, 25. (f) Prov. xix. 11.

prevent our Attention to such Circumstances as ought to damp and cool our Resentments, and fix it on those that tend to inflame and exasperate them, if the softest Answers and lowest Submissions are unheard or disdain'd, and the tenderest Expostulations and most earnest Entreaties are repaid only with abusive Language and threatned Revenge, if we misinterpret Acts of mere Indiscretion into deliberate Designs of Injury and Affront, and in the Transport of our Fury wound our Adversary either in his Person Reputation or Interest, in a Manner that is cruel and irreparable; in such Cases we not only divest ourselves of Religion but Humanity, are to be avoided as Beasts of Prey, and every Pretence we can make for being treated as Men, inhances our Guilt and aggravates our Reproach.

And give me leave to observe, that the best Way to prevent inordinate and excessive Anger, is to keep that Passion low in our Breast on most Occasions. For like Fire, to which it is so often compar'd, if it be once kindled, we know not to what Heights it may arise or what Mischief it may do before it is extinguish'd.

(3.) Anger too long continu'd is criminal, and inconsistent with Self-Government.

Anger may *rise* in the Heart of wise Men, but it *rests* only in the *Bosom* of Fools (g). The Apostle to that Exhortation, *be ye angry and sin not*, adds, *let not the Sun go down upon your Wrath, neither give place to the Devil* (h), that
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(g) Eccl. vii. 9.

(h) Eph. iv. 26.

is, do not quit the Reins of Government to him. It is *he* that rules and is obey'd when angry Resentments are harbour'd and cherish'd. And as the natural Consequence of this, the Mind is weaken'd and sharpen'd into Hatred and Revenge, 'till the Heart instead of being dispos'd to an easy generous Forgiveness, is render'd less impressible by every tender Sentiment, and at length becomes the Seat of cruel and unrelenting Malice.

History and Experience furnish us with various Instances of the sad Effects of Anger long indulged. That of *Jacob's Sons* is very flagrant, of which the pious Patriarch says, *Curfed be their Anger for it was fierce, and their Wrath for it was cruel (i)*. And it is so condemn'd and branded by the Rules and Examples of our holy Religion, that be the Provocation ever so great it ought not to be allowed among Christians, *O my Soul, come not thou into their Secret, into their Assembly mine Honour be not thou united (k)*; *Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger and Clamour and evil Speaking, be put away from you with all Malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's Sake hath forgiven you (l)*.

Thus have I finish'd the first Thing I propos'd, which was to consider *the Persons described in the Text, or that have no Rule over their own Spirits*. I now proceed,

(II.)

(i) Gen. xlix. 7. (k) Gen. xlix. 6. (l) Eph. iv. 31. 32.

(II.) To shew how sad and deplorable a Condition such Persons are in, with a more particular Reference to those of the last mention'd Character.

And (1.) One unhappy Consequence of neglecting the Controul and Government of our Spirit is, That we hereby weaken and reproach our Reason and deprive ourselves of it's Guardianship and Guidance.

Sober Reason or a sound Understanding is one of God's best Gifts to Man; and *he* who gave it, observes how *we* employ it. By this he hath exalted us above the *Beasts that perish*, but by the Abuse of it we put ourselves upon a Level with or rather sink beneath them; for the Prevalence of corrupt Passions untractable to the Reins of Reason, degrades the Dignity of our Natures, and reduces us to the Condition of Brutes. The human Soul depriv'd of it's distinguishing Glory and Guard, lies defenceless and desolate, like a *City broken down and without Walls*, expos'd to Calamities without Number or End.

I will make this City, saith God of Jerusalem, desolate and a Hissing, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished and hiss, because of all the Plagues thereof (m). And what Calamity can be more distressing than to be the Scorn and Contempt of an insulting and victorious Enemy, what Condition more abject and wretched than to lie at the Mercy of an arrogant and unrelenting Usurper! And yet what

(m) Jer. xix. 8.

what better Condition is that Soul in, which is agitated by enraged Appetites, polluted by furious Lusts or prostituted by the vilest Passions? when it tamely submits to Slaves it has a Right to rule? Is this to assert the Dignity and Distinction of our Natures and shew ourselves Men?—The Powers of Reason in it's present deprav'd State, I believe are not so perfect and extensive as some imagine, yet they are sufficient under Gospel-Grace to enable us to get the Mastery over headstrong Passions, unless we are grossly wanting to ourselves in the Use and Exertion of them.

(2.) Want of Self-Government deprives us of all the Benefit that arises from the superiour Light and Assistance of divine Revelation.

That can have no Effect upon a Spirit that is in perpetual Confusion and Uproar. Indulged and enraged Passions spread a Veil of thick Darkness over the Soul, that excludes every Beam of divine as well as natural Light. If their Dominion arises to any considerable Height and is apparent to the World, it is in vain for us so much as to put on the Garb of Religion. For whoever professes himself a Disciple of Christ, and yet is a Slave to his Lusts and Passions, dishonours his Pretensions, profanes the Temple of God, violates his Purity, breaks his Covenant, and forfeits his Privileges and Prospects. And how defenceless and desolate how contemptible and miserable is the Condition of such a Soul!

(3.) Want of Self-Government exposes us to the Influence of Temptation.

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The first Motion of unruly Passions, like *the Beginning of Strife (n)*, is as the *letting out of Water*; its Streams are small and may be easily resisted or diverted, but when they encrease and grow impetuous, they bear down all Opposition; Satan knows this so well, that in his first Attacks he is forc'd to use all his Subtily and Address, but when he has once succeeded he grows bolder and approaches us with an air of Authority. The Soul with it's Purity loses it's Power and Dignity, if it be once vanquish'd it more easily yields again; the first Defeat facilitates a second, or to adopt the Metaphor in the Text, when a Breach is made and enter'd, all the Rabble rush in as well as the regular Troops, Plunder and Robbery Devastation and Slaughter ensue, and the City is soon *broken down and without Walls*. Every Time we lose the Government of ourselves, the less able are we to make any further Resistance, each Compliance weakening our Strength, and abating our Aversion to the forbidden Object.

Satan is so well skill'd in the whole Art of Temptation by long Experience and great Success, that he is hardly discouraged from attacking Men of the most resolute Virtue, much less those whose Passions are violent and inflammable, and least of all such who have already comply'd with his Insinuations and consented to his Importunity. There is therefore no escaping or repelling his Attacks, but by making
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(n) Prov. xvii. 14.

a vigorous Resistance at first, keeping a strict Eye over our most turbulent Passions, furnishing our Minds with Wisdom, defending the Passage to our Hearts by a constant Vigilance, frequently imploring the Assistance of divine Grace, and committing our Souls to the Care of our ever merciful and faithful Redeemer.

(4.) Such a Want of Self-Government as before describ'd, intirely unsits the Mind for Communion with God.

Conformity to the blessed God and Communion with him through the Mediator, is the greatest Privilege of our World. Nearness to him is the Health and Life of the Soul, as Distance and Separation are its Disease and Death. The Sense of his Love creates that Joy, and the Apprehension of his Anger that Heaviness to an enlightened sensible Soul, that is not easy to be express'd. Light is not so grateful or chearing to the Eye, or Harmony to the Ear, as the Presence of God to a pious Soul.

There is an apparent Emptiness and Vanity in sensible Objects, an unsuitableness in them to the Nature of a Spirit, and an utter Insufficiency to fill it's Capacity; all their infinite Variety is of a limited Nature and short Duration, and however they may serve and suit degenerate Minds sunk down into Worldliness and Sensuality, such as have tasted the good Word of God, and felt the quickening Influences of the divine Spirit, aspire after nobler Joys and Delights. They ascend to God, and love to contemplate his Perfections and Works, they
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relish intellectual Pleasures, and are most in their Element when conversing with spiritual Objects; they exult in God's Image and Favour, and to unite their Spirits to the *Father of Spirits*, to increase their Acquaintance with him by Meditation, open their Hearts and approve their Intentions and Pursuits to him, is their highest Felicity and Ambition; and of all the Pleasures they ever tasted on Earth, they esteem and pronounce Communion with God the most noble and transcendent.

It may be observed among Men, that as their Faces and Hearts answer to one another, so they meet and converse with Pleasure, or turn away with Coldness and Neglect; when they become acquainted and perceive a Harmony of Tempers and Similitude of Sentiments, some good Degrees of Prudence and Benevolence Probity and Honour, and especially a sacred Regard to Conscience and the Approbation of God, when they find they are aiming at the same End, and determin'd by the same Views, and are alike dispos'd towards Truth and Righteousness, this naturally procures Esteem, creates Intimacy and Confidence, and puts them upon seeking Opportunities of Intercourse. In a Manner not unlike this, is a good Man's Friendship with God settled and secured, being founded in Love and Esteem, promoted by a growing Conformity to his Image and Will, and improv'd by Communion with him in a Way of Faith and devout Meditation on our Part, and divine and heavenly Manifestations of Mercy
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and Favour on his. And hence it is evident that an ungovern'd Spirit must be very unfit for Communion with God. One who is heated with Lust, overcharg'd with Sensuality, ruffled with Anger, sowerd with Envy, fretted with Anxiety, incumber'd with Cares, or fullen with Discontent, is as incapable of divine Communion as Darknes with Light, a dead Corps with a living Man, or an infernal with a cælestial Spirit. But the pure peaceable calm benevolent Mind, eminent for its Meekness Moderation and every well-govern'd Affection, will be the proper Habitation of God through the Spirit. For what is Communion with God and how does Happiness result from it? Does it not consist in fixing our Thoughts and Hearts supremely and ultimately on him, his Perfections and Providence, his Works and Ways and Will, his gracious Dealings and glorious Promises? and how can the Mind be sufficiently compos'd and recollected for such an Employment as this, if it be torn and agitated by violent irregular Affections? That our Hearts may be fixed on God, they must be withdrawn from other Objects, which they are not like to be, whilst fired with different and conflicting Passions. And to render our Communion really beneficial and delightful, the Affections must be calm, disengaged from other Objects, that on *their* Pinions the Soul may soar to Heaven, otherwise our Communion will have many jarring Notes that will greatly interrupt the
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the Harmony and obstruct the Benefit that might have been expected from it.

(5.) A Want of Self-Government is a great Enemy to the Peace of our Minds.

Peace is a very valuable Blessing, what all Men esteem, though many are mistaken in the Means of obtaining it. The common Form of Benediction among the *Jews* was, *Peace be with you*, under which Term they comprehended every kind of Good. In this extensive Sense our Lord used the Word *Peace*, when he bequeath'd it as his Legacy to his Disciples, *Peace I leave with you, my Peace I give unto you* (o); and again, *in the World ye shall have Tribulation, but in me ye shall have Peace* (p), intimating that the Benefit of the one would more than compensate the Damage of the other.

But take the Word in it's common Acceptation, denoting Rest or Tranquility of Mind, and it is one of the most desirable Blessings, and the Want of it one of the greatest Evils of Life. As is the Difference between a smooth and tempestuous Sea, or a serene and stormy Atmosphere, such is that between a calm and troubled Spirit. If Reason and Religion preside and the inferior Powers know their Place, Liberty and Tranquility reign throughout the whole Man; if furious Lusts or intemperate Passions bear sway, the Consequence is Slavery and Confusion, Anarchy and Uproar.

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(o) John. xiv. 27.

(p) John. xvi. 33.

Every Man hath a Conscience which will bring in it's Testimony according to his Conduct, whether it has been base or honourable, wise or foolish. If we have beheld the Prosperity of others without Envy, bore an Injury with Temper, kept Possession of ourselves under great Provocation, exercis'd Patience under heavy Afflictions, and especially if we have withstood a Temptation to which we were used to yield, how chearing is the Review! what Tranquility diffuses itself through the Heart! how serene and peaceful are our Spirits in the Hours of devout Retirement! and with what chearful Assurance may we invite and expect the Influences of the divine Spirit! But on the contrary, if we have lost the Possession of ourselves, and been agitated with lawless and unruly Passions, the Consequence must be Grief and Shame, Vexation and Torment. And all this is just and natural, for there can be no Peace without Order, and what can create greater Disorder and Tumult, than when the Passions have lost their just Subordination to Reason? We are then in the Condition of a State torn to Pieces with Faction and intestine Divisions, where the governing Powers are deposed, Justice and Magistracy trampled under Foot, every Man's Will is a Law, the Strongest overcomes the Weakest, all Dignity and Distinction are levell'd, all Decorum and Order swallowed up in Clamour and Outrage.

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(Lastly.)

(*Lastly.*) The Want of Self-Government very much hinders our publick Usefulness.

We may be helpful to others by our Piety and Prudence, good Example or good Advice. And bad as the World is, it does distinguish the Characters of Men, and holds some in a just Veneration, and others in as just a Contempt; and for the most Part, Men have the favourable or unfavourable Opinion of the Publick, according as they discover the Marks of calm and sedate Wisdom, or wild and boisterous Folly.

But if the unthinking Generality should not put a due Value on Men of cool and candid Dispositions, the better Part of Mankind will not fail to treat them with Esteem and Honour, whilst few point out the Passionate and Ungovernable as Objects of their Imitation or Applause, apply to them for Advice, or admit them to their Friendship and Confidence. They are the sober, dispassionate, condescending, disinterested and generous, who are fled to for Council and Relief in Seasons of Perplexity and Distress; on which Account the Scripture calls them *the Salt of the Earth*, and *the Lights of the World*. Reason recommends them to our Imitation, and Interest directs us to follow them. And in short, whatever Good is done in the World, with regard either to the Bodies or Souls, the Lives or Liberties of Mankind, such are most likely to be honour'd by Providence as the Instruments of effecting it. But to throw up the Reins to Appetite and Passion,
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to take Inclination instead of Reason for our Guide, is the Way to render ourselves in every Station of Life not only useless, but insignificant and contemptible.

These few Instances may suffice to shew what a sad and deplorable Condition that Man is reduced to, who loses the Government of himself or hath *no Rule over his own Spirit.*—The next Thing propos'd was,

(III.) To lay before you the Reasons that are most proper to induce us to labour after this Self-Command.—But this together with the two last general Heads must be reserv'd for the Subject of the next Discourse.





S E R M O N X.

Of the Government of the Spirit.



P R O V. XXV. 28.

He that hath no Rule over his own Spirit is like a City broken down and without Walls.



IN treating these Words, It was proposed,

(I.) To enquire who are the Persons described in the Text that *have no Rule over their own Spirits.*

(II.) What a sad and deplorable Condition such Persons are in.

(III.) What are the principal Reasons that should induce us to labour after the right Government of our Spirit.

(IV.) What Encouragement have we to attempt the attaining this Mastery of ourselves.

(V.)

(V.) To what useful Purposes may the Subject be applied.

The two first of these I have already dispatch'd, and therefore now proceed to enquire,

(III.) Why we should labour after the right Government of our own Spirits.

And all the Observations that shew the deplorable Condition of a neglected and disorder'd Spirit, are so many Arguments and Motives to aim at this noble and honourable Conquest; but the two I intend principally to insist on, are such as I should hope might have great Weight in this Assembly, namely, That it will be the highest Ornament of our Christian Character, and the best Preparation for the Happiness of Heaven.

(1.) It will be the *highest Ornament* of our *Christian Character*.

I am sensible the *Essence* of Religion consists in secret Transactions between God and the Soul, and in our being changed from the Love and Practice of Sin, to the Fear and Service of God. And that when once we come to be govern'd by an habitual prevailing Desire of pleasing and glorifying God in order to enjoy him, that then we truly deserve the Character of good Men, notwithstanding all the Remains of corrupt Dispositions that may continue to be working within us. But though the Truth of our Religion may be known to ourselves by these Means, yet all the Beauty and Lustre

of it in the Eyes of the World will be eclips'd and obscur'd, if our Affections are not wisely regulated and kept within reasonable Bounds. For there can be no Dignity of Character where there is not some Authority preserv'd over the inferior Powers of the Soul: If we easily lose the Command of ourselves, are at the Mercy of every cross Occurrence, give ourselves Airs of Resentment, and use domineering or opprobrious Language upon every slight Provocation, the World will be apt to say, (and possibly truly) that we have no Religion at all, or if we have any besides what is external, it will be like a *Pearl* in a Swine's Snout, misplaced and dishonour'd, or at least set to very great Disadvantage.

He that is slow to Anger (saith Solomon) *is better than the Mighty* (a). I know the World calls *them* Heroes that have made the greatest Havock and Destruction amongst their Fellow-creatures, who to gratify their Ambition and Lust of Power, have been the Plagues and Terror of their own Species, spreading Desolation and Carnage wherever they went; whereas in the Judgment of true Wisdom, he that yokes a stubborn Lust, curbs a boisterous Passion, and subdues an unruly Appetite, yielding to nothing but the Dictates of Virtue and Religion, obtains the greatest Victory and deserves the truest Honour. *The Wise inherit Glory.*

Christians should make it their Endeavour then, as it is certainly their Duty, to *shew out of a good Conversation their Works with Meek-*

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(a) Prov. xvi. 32.

ness of Wisdom, to excell in all the Graces that are truly ornamental to the Christian Character, and by that Means to obtain a good Report of others as well as the Testimony of their own Consciences, should labour to make it appear to the World that there is a Correspondence between their Temper and their Principles, and that their Religion is rather the Complexion of their Spirits than the external Badge of their Profession: Whereas on the contrary, how disreputable, how unnatural is it to see peevish passionate ill-natur'd Men, enjoying all the Advantages and Assurances of the mildest most benevolent and best natured Religion in the World? For as nothing can be more pleasing to us than when Persons who have been educated in bad Principles, discover an amiable Temper and Spirit, notwithstanding such great Disadvantages, so nothing brings a more visible and distinguish'd Reproach upon a Man, than to have his Spirit boisterous and untractable notwithstanding the most excellent Principles. And if the Reproach should not fall heavy upon *Us*, it most assuredly will upon our Religion, *that* will be evil spoken of for our Sakes, and instead of being recommended will be greatly disparaged by having such Men as us found amongst the Professors of it. And O Sirs! do you know the Mischief you are doing, when you are wounding the Interest and staining the Honour of your Religion? Whatever Liberties you apprehend you may take with yourselves, pray beware how you take Liber-

ties with *that*, and do it an Injury you may never be able to repair. And what can be a greater Injury, than representing it to the World as ineffectual for producing those good Dispositions of Mind, for which many of the *Heathens* were eminent? whereas if we, like our blessed Master, are meek and lowly of Heart, ready to forbear and forgive, careful to avoid doing wrong or giving Offence to others, and patient when we happen to receive them, all which necessarily results from ruling our own Spirits, we cannot shew either Religion or ourselves to a greater Advantage.

Many other Things on which much Stress is often laid by Christians, are little if at all more than the mere Garb and Dress of Religion, which they who are Strangers to its Power and Influence, wear in common with it genuine and hearty Disciples, from whence the profane World would infer that the whole is a *Counterfeit*, contrived by crafty Men to keep the superstitious Vulgar in awe; but nothing so effectually puts this malicious Slander out of Countenance, and evidences the divine original and heavenly Tendency of religious Principles and Hopes, as when Men of haughty untam'd and brutal Passions, by enlisting under its mild and gentle Sway, from being the Reproach become the Ornaments of human Nature.

2dly. This is the *best Preparative for the Happiness of Heaven.*

There are no Broils or Outrage, no boisterous or tumultuous Passions in those calm Regions,
but

but Harmony and Love in their highest elevation reign and triumph there. The Conflict between the Powers of Flesh and Spirit will be then ended, because our Souls in that State will be purified from all the Dross and Defilement which cleaves so fast to them in this. However this is the Season of our Purification, here the *first Fruits* are to arise, which there will be a plenteous Harvest. Here we must become the Sons of God, though there will be our more perfect Manifestation: It is vain for us to expect the Happiness of Heaven, if we are not qualified in some good Measure to enjoy it, and that Qualification is not *instantaneously* communicated to us at Death, but must be gradually wrought in the Soul, by the Use of those Helps and Assistances which God has appointed us for that very End. We must by a *patient Continuance* in well doing, and in the lively Exercise of every Christian Grace, *seek for Glory Honour and Immortality*, in the blessed Hope of eternal Life. Our Souls should be now attemper'd to the Business and Blessedness of that happy World, by having their Affections regulated, discharged from all undue Attachment to earthly Things, and used to that Deadness and Abstraction from sensible Objects, which is necessary to their being fix'd with perfect Intenseness and full Delight on those that are celestial and divine. We should be putting ourselves into such a Posture and Attitude as is most conformable to that of pure and perfect Spirits, be endeavouring that we may be gradually

dually so refined as to exult and be refreshed in that serene and peaceful Climate, which is never ruffled or be clouded with any Storms of Passion.

O! if Christians would but consider more seriously and frequently the Temper of the Inhabitants of that World to which they profess to be travelling, they could never be so anxious about any of the Affairs of this, as to lose the Command of themselves either in their highest Exaltation, or under their lowest Abasement! It is of so little Consequence how we are toss'd or treated here, that it is not worthy any great Concern of a truly wise and good Man what befalls him, when he is once satisfied that his Treasure and his Portion are secur'd in the Heavens.

(IV.) I am to shew the Encouragement we have to attempt the attaining the Mastery of ourselves.

And possibly some may say, ' this is a vain
' Attempt, human Nature being the same in
' all Ages and Places, and bad Dispositions
' and Habits discernible (though not in equal
' Degrees) amongst all Parties and Professions of
' Men. Self-Government (they may say) is a
' fine Theme for Declamation and sounds well
' in Theory, but where is it to be found ex-
' cept in the Heads of a few contemplative Men,
' who are equally Strangers to human Life
' and human Nature? Are not our Passions
' planted in our Being, and wrought into our
' Constitutions?

‘ Constitutions? are they not universal and
‘ perpetual? do they not fasten their Roots in
‘ our *Hearts*, and where is the Hand that can
‘ eradicate them? are not those whom we call
‘ *wise* and *good* enslaved by them as well as
‘ others? and can it be pretended that either
‘ Reason or Religion will so change the natu-
‘ ral Temper, as that the Passionate and Fear-
‘ ful and Melancholy, should become meek
‘ magnanimous and chearful? With what
‘ Hope of Success then can we attempt this
‘ arduous Work? do we not see how Nature
‘ defies Opposition? to restrain it’s Impulse is
‘ like repressing the Tide or repelling the
‘ Wind. In short when you curb a Passion
‘ for a while, what do you do else but irri-
‘ tate and inflame it, and render it on the next
‘ Occasion the more impetuous and ungovern-
‘ able?’

If this Account of Things was exactly true
as the Objection represents it, natural Light
and divine Revelation might withdraw their
Beams, there would be no Occasion or Use for
them, and every Attempt to rectify or im-
prove our Nature, would be as absurd and ridi-
culous as arguing with a Statue or educating a
Brute. I admit indeed that all Mankind inhe-
rit great Inconveniencies from the Parents of
our Race, and as they proceed in Life are apt
to contract bad Habits, which are often
strengthen’d by the Influence of corrupt Cus-
toms and Examples and the Impulse of sensible
Objects. I believe also that through our general
Weakness

Weakness and Depravity, Appetite and Inclination are oppos'd with Difficulty. Nay even wise and good Men are sometimes betray'd by those criminal and perverse Dispositions which they hop'd had been entirely subdued, and therefore it seldom or never happens that a compleat Victory is obtain'd in the present World. But then I add the Truth is not clearly represented in this Objection, and some Things are concluded upon insufficient Grounds, and I must insist that we have very great Encouragement to attempt the subduing our irregular Passions and attaining the Government of ourselves, for the following Reasons.

* (1.) We have *superior Powers* naturally capable of controuling and directing the inferior.

That Men are generally sway'd by Appetite and present *mistaken* Interest, and are too commonly Slaves to their Humours and Passions which gain Strength by Indulgence, is admitted. But yet *there is a Spirit in Man*, we have Reason Understanding and Conscience, can consider and reflect, and are at Liberty to chuse or refuse, whatever the Objects be that present themselves. And that all Men believe they are endow'd with noble Powers given them to this very End, is confess'd every Time we blame or punish the Irregularities and Disorders, we deem injurious to ourselves or pernicious to Society. We educate our Children, furnish and cultivate their Minds, train them to a Habit of thinking and reflecting, put them on their Guard against Vice and Folly, commend

commend and reward what is right, censure and punish what is wrong, and influence and direct their Hopes and Fears, so that they may become subservient to their Ornament and Defence. Now in all this, we take it for granted that there is no absolute Necessity that our Passions should rule and govern us, but that they are capable of being restrain'd and controul'd, and that it is our Duty to endeavour it. And the very Persons who deny this in Words, acknowledge it in their Conduct, and the contrary which they contend for, their Actions apparently contradict; and it is always a sure Sign of a false Principle, when by the mere Force of common Sense and Reason, that which we maintain in Theory, we are led to oppose in Practice.

If it be said, 'vicious Appetites and Passions are more rooted in the Mind with Age,' *that* only proves the restraining and rectifying them to be difficult, not impossible. If it were, the Persons that assert this, ought in order to be consistent with themselves, to act a Part very different from what they do. Instead of blaming and punishing, they ought to pity and excuse the most flagitious and execrable Sinners, arrest the Hand of Justice, and agree to banish all Law and Right, Rule and Government, Rewards and Punishments, out of the World. But how can any Principle be suppos'd true, that infers such mischievous and fatal Consequences as these?

(2.) This

(2.) This Attempt has been made in some Instances with Success.

Though it be a deplorable Truth that *the God of this World hath blinded the Minds* and perverted the Hearts of Men, and that by his artful and subtle Address, Multitudes of Souls are continually enslaved to their Passions; yet blessed be God! all the Infidelity Ignorance and Perverseness there is in the World, hath not totally banish'd Truth and Righteousness out of it. There are and always were good and wise Men, tho' comparatively but few. Vicious Appetites and evil Dispositions do not bear universal Sway. Every Heart is not inflexible and uncontrollable, God keeps up his Claim among his own Creatures, and some there are who by the regular Disposition of their whole Frame, readily acknowledge and loudly proclaim his rightful Authority and just Dominion over them.

He did not leave himself without Witness among the Heathen, that there was something in the Force of Reason the Voice of Conscience and the Influence of human Precept and Example, to make Men wise and virtuous, and to tame and subdue the wild and unsocial Passions; *For the Gentiles who had not the Law of Revelation, did by Nature the Things contain'd in the Law (d).* And in the most dark and degenerate Ages of the World, there have not been wanting those who have made a noble Stand against Error and Wickedness, and who have
asserted

(d) Rom. ii. 14.

asserted the Cause of Truth and Virtue, who have carried the Art of Self-Government to a great Height of Perfection, and have demonstrated to their Fellow-creatures, that if they daily did what they could not defend, they must expect inward Reproaches which they could not endure. Now if in any Instances we discern the plain and remarkable Effects of asserting the Power and Dominion of the superior Faculties, and of restraining and subjecting the inferior ones, this is a great Encouragement to make and repeat the Attempt, if the first Essay should prove unsuccessful. But

(3.) Divine Revelation furnishes us with the best Assistances for this very Purpose.

It suggests to us the most powerful Motives, arising from the Necessity of the Case, the Nature of our Happiness, the Obligations of our Character, and the Example of our great Head and Master, the Views we entertain, and the Profession we make as Christians. Sometimes it addresses our Fears, by representing the unspeakable Misery of those who live and die under the chosen Dominion of their Lusts, and sometimes it cheers and enlivens our Hope, with the Prospect of that perfect and perpetual Felicity promised to those who finally conquer and prevail. Moreover

The Christian Revelation lays before us the most perfect Rules for our attaining the right Government of our Spirits, by endeavouring to improve in divine Knowledge, by *keeping our Hearts with all Diligence*, by carefully avoiding

ing all known Temptations, by resolutely resisting all unavoidable ones, by shunning even the Appearance of Evil, giving ourselves to Prayer, being constant in the Exercises of Faith, getting our Hearts more indifferent to the World, being frequent and faithful in the Business of Self-Examination, and above all cultivating a Spirit of Meekness Forbearance and Love. These and the like Directions are frequently inculcated in the sacred Writings, and when duly attended to and practis'd, are capable of transforming the Soul into an amiable Resemblance of the divine Perfections. Above all

It offers us the most effectual Aids for attaining a compleat Conquest, *viz.* the all-sufficient Strength of God in proportion to our Trials, *Grace to help in Time of Need*, the holy Spirit which God hath promis'd to *every one that asks him*, and who is ready to alleviate our Infirmities, to relieve our Weaknesses, to assist our willing Efforts, to subdue our Corruptions and secure our final Victory. So that in all his spiritual Conflicts, though ever so unequal, the Christian hath no room to despair of Success, whilst he hath an almighty Aid to fly to, and Strength superior to every Difficulty.

(*Lastly.*) The Success of the Attempt will abundantly recompence all the Pains we can take to attain it.

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Agreeable to which is the Observation of the wise Man, *That he who ruleth his own Spirit is greater than he that taketh a City (e).* He is not only worthy of greater Honour, but receiveth a greater Recompence, for his Pains. So that if it may be done at all, it ought at all Events to be attempted. To hesitate at the Hardships to be endur'd, and the Difficulties to be encounter'd, argues an unmanly Weakness where the Prize we contend for is glorious and unfading. Where is the Cause that will animate our low and languid Spirits, if we droop and falter here? Sure it should warm the coldest Heart, rouse and inflame the meanest Spirit that ever lurked under a human Form, to have all the noble Powers by which we claim Alliance with Angels, dragg'd in captive Chains by a vile abominable Lust! to see the Image of the Deity stamp'd upon our Souls utterly defac'd, and every Lineament destroy'd, that carries any Signature of the Hand of our Divine Maker! If our Children were to be torn from us into a base and cruel Bondage, nay if our Possessions only were seized by the Hands of Oppression and Violence, we should want no Motives to assert and defend our invaded Rights, perhaps at the Peril of our Lives, and yet we are too apt to be unaffected with the Loss of our Freedom and Liberty as Intellectual and Spiritual Beings; a Loss that is attended with a Reproach never to be effac'd, and a

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(e) Prov. xvi. 32.

Bondage never to be endur'd! For to what am I now exhorting you, but to maintain your own Rights and Priviledges as Men, and to stand up for the Cause of Liberty? that Liberty upon the Safety of which depends your everlasting Peace and Honour, where all the Opposition we meet with should only excite our greater Courage, for in Proportion to the Sharpness of the Combat will be the Glory of the Triumph; and he who hath shewn us the Way to conquer, and affords us Strength in the Day of Trial, will assuredly both succeed and reward our unshaken Constancy in his Service, according to that divine Promise, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my Throne even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his Throne (f).* And now,

V. To what useful Purposes may this Subject be applied? And I answer,

I. It teaches us the *Necessity of Regeneration.*

For if good Men have so much Reason to watch over their Hearts, to take Pains to regulate their Affections and Dispositions, even after the Judgment Will and Affections are renew'd, What deplorable Ruins are such Souls in, who have never yet been changed by the enlightening and sanctifying Influences of the divine Word and Spirit? If the change is far from being perfect in the best Christians, how distant must they be from the Kingdom

dom of Heaven, in whom no change has been made at all? Our Saviour therefore with great Propriety and Judgment taught this as a *capital* Doctrine of his Religion, to a Ruler of the Jews who acknowledg'd him to be a Teacher sent from God. * *Verily verily I say unto Thee, except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God;* Plainly and strongly declaring that our Nature is so corrupt and defiled; that in order to our becoming his Disciples and worthy to partake of the Priviledges of his Gospel, we must (as it is expressed in another Place,) *be created after God in Righteousness and true Holiness.* † And tho' this Doctrine may at Times have been spoken of by some weak and enthusiastic Persons in an injudicious and improper Manner, by straining figurative and metaphorical Expressions beyond their true and natural Construction, yet I apprehend most if not all serious Christians agree, that what Divines have usually called *Conversion* or *Regeneration*, really implies *a thorough Change of the whole Man, from the Love and Practice of Sin to an habitual Holiness of Heart and Life, ordinarily in the Use of the Means of Grace, and always under the Influence of the Spirit of God.* And I cannot help lamenting that any amongst us should so much misconstrue the Exhortations given in Scripture to Diligence and Activity, as to forget or overlook the constant daily Need we stand in of divine Aids, both at our Entrance upon, and for our Advancement

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* John iii. 7.

† Ephes. iv. 24.

in the Christian Life; and that on the other Hand, any should understand the Expressions used (with so much Wisdom and Compassion to our Infirmities) denoting the Necessity of divine Assistance, which are intended to keep us watchful humble and dependant, as inferring the Impropriety of Exhortations to Diligence in the Duties of Religion. Whereas the truth is, we can never be too diligent or active in working out our own Salvation, and Exhortations to such Diligence are always seasonable and needful, and yet when we have done our best, we ought to be sensible that we are under infinite Obligations to the Grace of God, both for assisting and accepting us. *What God therefore hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

2dly, I infer the great Folly and Evil of a *vain Curiosity* in Religion, and of a severe and censorious Spirit.

Our great Business lies at home and within, with ourselves and in our own Hearts, and we shall find Employment enough there, if we do but engage in this Work and pursue it as we ought. When we are eager to be acquainted with Things that concern us not at all, or very little, it is a Sign we are great Strangers to what concerns us most. For if we were to turn our Eyes inward, and to view the frequent Disorders there are in our *best* Dispositions and Frames, much more in our *worst*, and were as heartily inclined, as we are highly obliged to rectify what is amiss, we should behold

behold so wide and important a Field of Action within our own Bounds and Limits, as would greatly indispose us to seek for any abroad. Curiosity is only fit for such as are idle, but it is dangerous if indulged by those who have Employment that is necessary and ought to be constant. And what Employment can be so necessary, or can require or deserve a more constant Attention, than watching our own unsteady Hearts, guarding our unruly Passions, and endeavouring to maintain that Dignity of Character, which becomes those who profess themselves to be Servants and Sons of the most high God? And yet how apt are Christians to slacken in their Care of themselves, whilst they divert to other Objects, pry into Matters of doubtful Speculation or into other Men's Affairs? Our Saviour checked this Disposition in *Peter*, who enquiring concerning another Disciple, *and what shall this Man do?* Jesus saith unto him, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee, follow thou me (g).*

And if a curious Temper is worthy of Blame, a censorious one is much more so, and indeed the former leads to the latter; and yet what more common than to be finding Fault with the Faith, or Character, or Temper, or Behaviour of others, whilst we are grossly negligent of our own? Such Persons are generally sure to lay the main Stress upon those Things which they find most easy, or them-

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selves

selves most likely to excel in, and endeavour to engross the general Attention about them, so as hardly to give an Opportunity for observing others, wherein they are most apt to be careless; and every Defect in their Fellow-Christians is magnified, that their own in Matters equally or more important, may be conceal'd or diminished.

I am sorry to say this Evidence of the Want of Self-government is too apparent among us, even such of us as value ourselves on our *Charity*, as well as those of us who are eminent for our *Zeal*. We are quick-sighted to spy out the *Mote* in our Brother's Eye, whilst we are insensible of the *Beam* in our own; remarking with too much Readiness and Pleasure on the Failings and Infirmities of others, especially if they differ with us in any religious Sentiments, whilst we are most flagrantly partial to ourselves. *But who art thou that judgest another Man's Servant? To his own Master he stands or falls. And why dost thou judge thy Brother, or why dost thou set at nought thy Brother (b)?* The most effectual Remedy of this, is to turn the Scrutiny in upon ourselves, see what there is in us, on which our Animadversions may fasten, this will either cure the Severity of our Spirits, or make it turn to a very good Account.

3dly, I infer the Necessity of frequent *Self-examination* and an intimate *Self-acquaintance*.

This is a Duty I believe often recommended
but

(b) Rom. xiv. 4, — 10.

but seldom practised, or if it in, we perform it in so superficial and negligent a Manner as to lose the Benefit we might otherwise reap from it. We must examine in order to know ourselves, and we must know ourselves in order to rectify and remedy the Disorder of our Spirits. I doubt when we perform this Part of our Duty, we usually hasten over that Branch of Self-government wherein we find ourselves most defective, set it down under the Head of *unavoidable* Infirmity, and do not sufficiently enquire into the Source and Cause of those predominant evil Affections which ought to be controul'd, the ill Influence they have on our general Temper and Conduct, and the Reproach to which they expose us; and that we don't sufficiently impress our Minds with a Sense of their odious Nature and dangerous Effects, and lay down Rules and take up Resolutions that might enable us to gain some Strength and Advantage over them for the future. What avails Self-examination, if we go on indulging the same ill Spirit, which this Exercise is designed to remedy? Can it be supposed we do really examine with that Impartiality or with those upright Intentions which become us?

Let us therefore set about this Work in *good earnest*, get a thorough Acquaintance with ourselves, search into the inmost Recesses of our Souls, be satisfied not only of the Principle and Spring of our Actions, that in the general *that is* right and pure, but know the exact State of Things

Things there, the Strength and Influence of each Passion and Affection, what is most apt to excite it, and what to cool and moderate it, whether it is gradually gaining upon us, or whether it loses Ground in our Hearts; let us particularly ponder any Instance or Occasion wherein it has been prevalent and unruly, and fix on our Minds an abiding Sense how great a Reproach it brought on us (i).

And let not the best, the most experienced and established Christians think themselves unconcerned in this Advice. Though our Hearts may have been softened and changed, yet it highly becomes us to exercise a godly Jealousy and a constant Watchfulness over ourselves; the Frame of our Minds may be very blame-worthy, and dishonourable to our Christian character, though our State be good; We may cherish the Seeds of great future Trouble and Uneasiness in our own Breasts, though we don't make an absolute Forfeiture of our Interest in the Favour of God. The falls of such eminent Saints as *David* and *Peter* should be awakening Calls to Watchfulness and Humility, not to be high minded but fear, lest a Promise being left us of entering into Rest any of us should seem to come short of it. Humility is our trust

(i) In order to the Performance of this necessary Work in the best Manner, I take the Liberty of recommending to my Reader a most excellent and admirable Piece on this Subject, wrote by my worthy and ingenious Friend the Reverend Mr. John Mason, entitled SELF-KNOWLEDGE, which will abundantly supply all the Defects in those Rules I am here capable of laying down.

est Honour, and will be our greatest Security; whereas nothing so much unguards and exposes us, as an Insensibility of our Weakness, and a fond Imagination that we are Proof against Temptations; such *Self-confidence* which is the Effect of Pride and Ignorance, is commonly a sure Presage of approaching Disgrace and Calamity, according to the wise Man's Observation, *That Pride goeth before Destruction, and a haughty Spirit before a Fall* (k).

Now nothing will gain us so perfect a Knowledge of our natural Pride and Self-sufficiency, as conversing with ourselves, comparing our Temper and Conduct with our Rule, and this is the proper Business of Retirement; the Reflections of the Closet, and the serious Examination of our own Hearts and Lives, will tend naturally to rectify our Errors and preserve and increase our Purity. We are so apt to consider rather how our Temper and Behaviour appear in the Eyes of the World, than how they appear in the Eye of God, that it is necessary for us to be *alone*, in order that Conscience may do its Office, look through the exterior Face of Things, and see the true Principles from which we act, lest we in the End deceive ourselves by those very Pretences and Appearances with which we have imposed upon others. For want of this, many *die* as well as live almost wholly *Strangers to themselves*, and no wonder they do not rectify those Disorders in their Spirits, of which they

they are in a great Measure ignorant, or if not entirely ignorant of their Existence, yet insensible of their destructive Nature and Tendency, because upon the first *Feelings* of the Mind, they fly to Business or Recreation to prevent any further uneasy Impressions. Whereas if they would but sometimes solemnly recollect themselves, cause their inmost Principles and Motives to pass before them in review, when no Eye sees them but *his* that penetrates the Heart, they could not but know the prevailing Disposition of their Minds, and knowing it, could not fail making some serious and vigorous Attempts to correct and improve it. Above all,

4. Let me earnestly exhort you to invite and cherish the Influences of the *divine Spirit*.

Implore his Illumination, invoke his Aids, attend his Motions. Humbly intreat him to open your Hearts, to discover you to yourselves, and to *take of the Things of Christ, and shew them unto you*. Beware of grieving or quenching him, and learn the *reality*, by the apparent Influence of his divine Operations on your Hearts and Lives. Never rest satisfied with any Frame of Mind, however devout and elevated, that does not leave the Affections pure and calm and heavenly, dispose and fit you for the Service of God in the various Duties of Life, as well as in the Ordinances of Religion, raise your Hearts above all undue Attachments to present Things, prepare for Days of Darkness and Suffering, as well as those of
Light

Light and Enjoyment, bring you to an humble Acquiescence in all the Disposals and Dispensations of divine Providence; and knowing how hard it is to be fully acquainted with yourselves and to rectify your various Defects, be frequently addressing yourselves to the blessed God in the Language of the pious Psalmist, *Search me O God and know my Heart, try me and know my Thoughts, and see if there be any wicked Way in me, and lead me in the Way everlasting (1).*

(1) Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.





S E R M O N XI.

Of the prevailing Love of Pleasure.



I S A I. xlvii. 8.

-----*Thou that art given to Pleasures,
that dwellest carelessly,*-----



THESE Words were spoken of *Babylon*, after it had been mark'd out by Providence for an intire and perpetual Destruction, and while they intimate how much it was deserv'd, plainly declare how little it was expected.

The Prophet *Daniel* tells us, that *Nebuchadnezzar* the King of *Babylon*, as he was walking in the Palace of his Kingdom, express'd himself in this lofty and arrogant Language, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the House of my Kingdom, by the Might of my Power, and for the Honour of my Majesty (d)?*
Babylon

(a) Dan. iv. 30.

Babylon was one of the most antient Cities, and had been so improv'd by this Monarch as to become the Wonder of the World (b). Nor could the Magnificence of his Works be equall'd by any thing but the Haughtiness of his Heart. However this vain-glorious Boast was no sooner utter'd, than there came a Voice from Heaven, saying *The Kingdom is departed from thee* (c).

This sudden and signal Denunciation of divine Vengeance, though it had a good Effect upon *Nebuchadnezzar*, had none at all upon the Successors to his Throne, or the Subjects of his Kingdom, who still continued addicted to Luxury and Self-Confidence (the too common Effects of Ease and Opulence) for which Vices *Babylon* had been long notoriously infamous; and whereby it at length incurr'd that severe Threatning which follows the Words of the Text: *Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to Pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine Heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a Widow, neither shall I know the Loss of Children. But these two Things shall come to thee in a Moment, in one Day, the Loss of Children and Widowhood; they shall come upon thee in their Perfection, for the Multitude of thy Sorceries, and for the great Abundance of thine Enchantments.*

The Person who was the Instrument of accomplishing this awful Prediction was *Cyrus*, who

(b) Vid. *Prid. Connect.* Part. I. B. 2. p. 44, &c.

(c) *Dan.* iv. 31.

who after he had made a great Figure in the World, finished his Character and his Conquests, in the Overthrow of the *Chaldean* Empire; and having gained a Victory over the King of *Babylon* in the Field, drove him into his Capital and invested it. The prodigious Strength of the Place (d), and the Plenty of Provisions with which it was supplied, occasion'd the Siege to continue two Years. During which Time, *Cyrus* was frequently insulted by the *Chaldeans* from their Walls. However he found

(d) The Walls of it were 29 Yards thick, 117 high, and 60 Miles in Compass, in the Form of a Square; 15 Miles each Side, (this is *Herodotus's* Account who was himself at *Babylon*) all built of large Brick, cemented together with *Bitumen*, a Mortar that soon grew much harder than Stone. On the Outside of the Walls was a vast Ditch, fill'd with Water, and lin'd with Bricks on both Sides; and of the Earth dug out of the Ditch, were the Bricks made for the Walls. On each Side were 25 Brazen Gates; 4 great Towers at the 4 Corners, and 3 between each Gate; each Tower above 3 Yards higher than the Wall. From these 25 Gates went 25 Streets, to the Gates that answered them on the opposite Side. So the Number of Streets were 50, each 15 Miles long; of which 25 went one Way and 25 the other, dividing the City into 676 Squares, each of which was above 2 Miles in Compass. On the Outside of these Squares, stood the Houses, 3 or 4 Stories high; and the Middle of each Square was all void Ground, used for Yards, Gardens, Orchards, &c. A Branch of the River *Euphrates* ran quite cross the City; over which in the middle of the City, was a Bridge of a Furlong in length, and ten Yards in breadth. At one End of this Bridge stood a Palace, and at the other End another Palace, and the Temple of *Belus*; which last was reckoned the most magnificent *Ædifice* in the World. Vid. *Herodoti Histor.* l. 1. cap. 178, &c. *Prideaux's Connect.* Part I. Book 2. p. 95, &c.

found Means at length to become Master of the City in one Night, by the following Stratagem.—Not far from the River *Euphrates*, which ran through the City, there was a Canal leading to a large artificial Lake. The Bank between the River and the Canal, he gave Orders should be broke down, by which means the whole Current of Water was turned into the Lake. Then collecting all his Forces together, he posted one Part of them at the Place where the River ran into the Town, and the other where it came out, with Orders to enter in through the Channel of the River, as soon as it became fordable. These Orders were obeyed, and both Parties entering the City at the same Time, advanced directly to the Palace, where they surprized and defeated the Guards; and when on the Uproar which this occasioned, some within the Palace, open'd the Gates to know what it meant, the Enemy rushed in, and finding the King with his domestick Friends and Servants, they slew him, and those that were with him valiantly fighting for their Lives; whereupon the City immediately submitted. But the Success of this bold Enterprize was in great Measure owing to the Neglect and Security of the Inhabitants, who were celebrating a grand Festival that very Night, with excessive Intemperance and Debauch.

This astonishing Revolution casts a Light on many Passages in the Writings of this and the other Prophets, and at the same Time carries our Thoughts forward to mystical *Babylon*,

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that Mother of Harlots, and Abominations of the Earth (e), and to those Predictions which we have of her approaching Overthrow ; when it will be as truly said of her, as it now may of *Babylon* of old, whom she so much resembles both in Magnificence and Iniquity, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great City, because she made all Nations drink of the Wine of the Wrath of her Fornication (f).*

From such Events as these, it is natural to remark, that there not only usually is in the wise Constitution of Providence, an appointed Time when God inflicts heavy Vengeance on corrupt and profligate Nations, of which his unerring Wisdom directs him always to make the most exact and perfect Judgment ; but that there are certain Sins which in their own nature as necessarily tend to the Destruction of Society, as some kinds of Diseases do to the Dissolution of the animal Body ; Vices which are not only shameful and infamous in themselves, but draw after them a Train of publick Calamities, and are apparent Symptoms of decreasing Strength and departing Glory ; Vices of that Rank and fertile Nature that almost all others grow out of them. Such I mean, as were the first Omens and the immediate Forerunners of the *Babylonian's* Destruction, for they could never have been conquer'd by the Arms of *Cyrus*, if they had not been given to Pleasures, and dwelt carelessly. Their Character and their Overthrow are therefore left

(e) Rev. xiv. 8.

(f) Rev. xvii. 5.

left upon Record, as a memorable Warning-Piece to all succeeding Nations, to avoid the same Sins, as they would not share the same Desolation.

Pleasure abstractedly consider'd and its general Nature is innocent and desireable; it is attributed to the Deity, and said to be the final Portion of his Friends and Favourites; *In his Presence is Fulness of Joy, and at his Right Hand are Pleasures for evermore.* And the reasonable Gratification of those Faculties and Appetites with which our Creator has endow'd us, is such a Happiness as we are under no Obligation to deny ourselves: For altho' our Faculties are greatly impair'd, and our Appetites deprav'd, by that general Defection from God, in which the whole human Race is involv'd, yet undoubtedly there is still a very allowable and laudable Satisfaction and Pleasure that may be enjoy'd, even in worldly and sensible Good, to alleviate the Burthens and soften the Cares of Life. The Danger and Mischief to which we are expos'd from this Quarter, lies only in the Excess; but the Danger being imminent, and the Mischief most extensive and fatal, they cannot be guarded against with too early and assiduous a Care.

Man is a compound Being, rational as well as animal, and therefore capable of Pleasures of various Kinds, which may be distinguish'd into those of the Senses, of the Imagination, of the Understanding, and the Pleasures of the Soul, or such as are moral and divine. Brutes

partake with us in the first, in the last we have Communion with Angels and the blessed Spirits above; the former bespeak us Children of the Earth, and betray our Kindred to Worms; the latter proclaim us the genuine Offspring of the Eternal and Unchangeable Source of Excellence: By any Excess in the one, we debase our Natures, and increase our Degeneracy; but we promote our Dignity and Perfection, by all Advances in the other.

These things consider'd, we may easily judge what kind of Pleasures it was, for which the *Babylonians* are threaten'd in the Text, viz. an Addictedness to sensual Pleasure, with a Carelessness or total Unconcern about those that are intellectual and divine. *Thou that art given to Pleasures, that dwellest carelessly*; for indeed Carelessness or want of sober Thought and Reflection, is the true Cause why the Streams of Pleasure proceed with so rapid a Torrent as to overflow their Banks, and lay Waste some of the fairest and most delightful Productions of Nature. Thus *Babylon* the great, abounding in Wealth and Power, in every Thing that could minister to Safety and Delight, falls a Sacrifice to the Debauchery and Riot of its Inhabitants. Amazing Inconsideration! that with a victorious and ever-vigilant Prince, and a numerous Army at their Gates, they should suffer themselves to be surprized, by indulging to a Security and giving a Loose to Pleasures, that would have been highly criminal in a time of the most profound and uninterrupted Tranquility.

And

And happy were it for us, if we in this Nation had no Reason to fear that *Babylon's* Fate may one Day be ours. But alas ! a prevailing and extravagant Taste for Pleasures, which serve for little else but to enervate the Minds and corrupt the Manners of our People, are threatening Symptoms of our growing Degeneracy and impending Ruin ; and so contagious is the Disease, that no Place or Age, no Sex or Condition, no Party or Profession of Men, seems entirely free from the Infection. The grave as well as the gay, Persons of mature Age as well as giddy Youth, Men of Business as well as Men of Pleasure, those who have their Bread to earn, as well as those who have Estates to spend, Professors of Religion as well as Contemners of it, go great Lengths in our licentious Days, in Practices that our Forefathers would have been highly ashamed of. If *they* were too rigid and precise, we have relaxed beyond all Bounds and Measure. Not only this great City itself, but all the Avenues to and from it, are thick set with Houses and Places of Diversion ; and Trade, and Arts, and Learning, and Religion, all pay Tribute to them, and are forc'd to confess their Power. There must be *Elegance* now a days, in the Dress and Table and Houses and Furniture of those, whose highest Ambition ought to be *Neatness* ; and our indolent and effeminate Youth claim Indulgences, that used to be the utmost Privilege of hoary and reverend Age. But the Poison is offered in a golden Cup, and

who will refuse to drink it? The Ingredients must be grateful and salutary, because so many who have once tasted, are eager to repeat the Draught; and who can be so rustick and unpolite as to decline the almost only Pursuit, that engrosses the Esteem and Regard of the rest of Mankind?

Thus Pleasure is the Idol to which the Generality pay continual Homage, and offer the most costly Incense. They are never weary of dancing in this enchanted Circle, and Life hangs heavy on their Hands, till they return to the bewitching Chace. A Man who was to sit down and observe the Intenseness and Alacrity discovered by many in this Pursuit, (and which they discover in nothing else) would be apt to imagine, That all the Maxims of *Solomon* and other Sages of Antiquity concerning the Vanity of sensual Delights, had been reversed and exploded by the Experience of later Days; that there is no such Vexation or Disappointment attending them as some timorous enthusiastick People have been apt to pretend; and that amongst the Improvements of the present Age, one of the most extraordinary ones was to be imputed to the Men of Taste, who had hit upon an happy Expedient for maintaining their Pleasures in perpetual Bloom, and their Appetites in undiminish'd Vigour.

But if we were to take a few Steps into the Crowd, and could see with Respect to those especially who have been long engaged in the Pursuit,

Pursuit, the Distraction or Weakness of their Understandings the Fretfulness and Vexation of their Hearts, the Confusion and Embarrassments of their worldly Business, the Incumbrances of their Fortunes and Estates, and the Want of Decorum and Order, of Peace and Harmony in their Households, what a melancholly and affecting Scene would be open'd to our View! We should discover them to be (notwithstanding all their glittering Attire) a Crowd of miserable Mortals in Disguise, seeking to impose upon each other and upon themselves, endeavouring to unlearn the wise Precepts of their Ancestors, to hide themselves from the upbraidings of neglected Duties and deserted Families, and to drown the Voice of Conscience, and the Voice of Religion, in the Tumult and Uproar of wild and extravagant Mirth.

That I may therefore shew the Danger and Evil of an Addictedness to sensual Pleasure in their true Colours, and stripp'd of all Disguise, and by that Means if possible, render so seasonable and awful a Warning as that in the Text, really beneficial to ourselves; I propose

I. To consider the *Nature* of sensual Pleasures. And

II. The *pernicious Effects* of an undue Indulgence of them, and that with respect to publick Communities and particular Persons.

I. I am to consider the *Nature* of these Pleasures themselves.

And besides the Meanness of them, and that they are adapted to the lower and less noble Part of our Constitution, which is what I have already taken notice of; It may not be amiss to observe,

1. That they are *deceitful and unsatisfying*.

And we need not search into the Treasuries of Learning, or the Records of antient Time, to illustrate an Observation so obvious and demonstrable as this. Who of us, in the Time of our Youth especially, ever found in a sensual Delight, however innocent, much less if criminal, what we expected from it and *that* promised us? Every Moment seemed perhaps to linger and drag on, till the Object of our Wishes was enjoy'd, but the Instant we were ready to grasp the eagerly expected Joy, it wither'd in our Arms, or vanish'd from our Sight. However the next airy Phantom that presented itself, was to make us Amends for the Disappointment of the former, but that Bubble burst also as soon as the Experiment was repeated; so that at length however reluctant, we have been forc'd to confess, we had chosen for ourselves *a Bed shorter than a Man could stretch himself on, and a Covering narrower than what he could wrap himself in* (g).

But supposing we were not deluded, and that the Enjoyment did in some Measure answer out Expectations; yet did it satisfy us? Alas no! the sensual Appetite may be easily cloy'd,

(g) Isai. xxviii. 20.

cloy'd, but can never be satisfied; it may be jaded, but after a little respite, becomes more restless and impetuous thro' Indulgence. Frequent Gratifications inflame, but never quench the raging thirst of Passion. Its Expectations will perpetually rise, as we give Way to its Cravings; so that what once perhaps were only gentle and soothing Invitations to gain our Consent, by degrees become peremptory Demands, that can neither be complied with, nor resisted. We are first won upon by Falshood and Flattery, but ruled at last with a Tyrant's Rod, and find our Slavery to be both unavoidable and intolerable.

And whose Heart now does not glow with Indignation at so cruel and inglorious a Bondage as this, to be first betray'd by a Harlot's painted Charms, and then trampled on by her Power? Yet notwithstanding this, to how many in our Day is that just and lively Description of Solomon applicable; *With her much fair Speech she caused him to yield, with the Flattery of her Lips she forced him, He goeth after her straightway, as an Ox goeth to the Slaughter, or as a Fool to the Correction of the Stocks, till a Dart strike through his Liver, as a Bird hasteth to the Snare, and knoweth not that it is for his Life (b).*

2dly, Sensual Pleasures are painful in the Review.

There is something that mortifies and disgusts us in a Reflection on the most moderate

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(b) Prov. vii. 21, 22, 23.

derate and innocent of our bodily Pleasures; that they are so momentary and tasteless, that they have so much the Appearance of waking Dreams and fleeting Shadows; in so much that we are inclined to despise at one Time what we eagerly pursued at another, to loath the Object we have just embraced, and to look back with Indifference and Contempt, towards what we looked forward with Desire and Delight. But when our Pleasures have been criminal either in kind or degree, and Shame and Remorse for *our own* Wickedness, are added to our Reflections on *their* Vanity, how severely painful is the Review! And yet painful as it is, how contentedly do Men submit to be again and again imposed upon by the Imposture they have so often detected, not suffering their own Experience to make them wise, but still hunting the same vain Objects their Fathers and themselves have pursued without Success, running the same Ground over and over again, as if it were a new discovered Track, till they are forced to add their Testimony to that of those who went before them, of the fruitless Toil and Vanity of the Chace, and probably as little to the Benefit of those that come after them! Which leads me to the next general Head I proposed,

II. To consider the *pernicious Effects* of an inordinate Indulgence to such Pleasures. And this,

1st, With Respect to *publick Communities*.

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The Prosperity of a Nation, consists in its Wealth, its Power, its Improvement in Arts and Sciences, and its Liberty and Independency; but a general and prevailing Love of Pleasures, exhausts its Wealth, enervates its Power, leaves Arts and Sciences uncultivated, changes Liberty first into Licentiousness, and then into Slavery. It destroys or at least greatly diminishes that Spirit of Industry, Frugality, Temperance, and Oeconomy, that turn for Trade and Commerce, upon which the flourishing State of almost every Nation depends, and it introduces that Indolence, Luxury, Effeminacy, Petulance, Pride, Discontent, contempt of Authority, and those complaints of Government and Governors, which are the Bane of Society, render a Kingdom divided weak and contemptible, first the Scorn and then the easy Prey of any powerful ambitious Neighbour; and as the natural Consequence of a National and general Depravity, draws down the righteous Judgment of Almighty God, who for such Sins and Provocations as these brought a sudden and overwhelming Destruction (as we have just seen) on the City of *Babylon*, giving her up to Ruin and Destruction, she having first given up herself to Pleasures.

And though the divine Vengeance is not usually executed till after great Patience and Long-suffering has been exercised towards such abandoned Nations, yet nevertheless it will *certainly* be executed, unless prevented by a timely Repentance and Reformation, and it often

often comes down with additional Weight and Terror, for having been long held back by the Arm of Mercy. The utter and final Overthrow of *Babylon* was the frequent Subject of antient Prophecy, before it was accomplished, as may be learnt from those Words of the Prophet Jeremiah, Jer. i. 24, 25, 26. *I have laid a Snare for thee and thou art also taken O Babylon, and thou wast not aware, thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord. The Lord hath opened his Armory and hath brought forth the Weapons of his Indignation; for this is the Work of the Lord God of Hosts, in the Land of the Chaldeans. Come against her from the utmost Borders, open her Store-houses, cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly, let nothing of her be left. And Jer. ii. 6. Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every Man his Soul, be not cut off in her Iniquity; for this is the Time of the Lord's Vengeance, he will render unto her a Recompence.* But when neither the threatening Aspect of Providence, nor the solemn Predictions of Prophecy, could rouse this lethargic Nation out of its State of Dissolution and Impurity, Desolation came upon her like lightening from Heaven, and her Destruction as a Whirlwind.

Nor is *Babylon* the only City that stands as an awful Monument of divine Vengeance against a debauched and profligate People. *Jerusalem* once the Place of God's peculiar Residence and Delight, afterwards became execrable

crable for the Murder of that compassionate Friend and Saviour of Men, who shed Tears of the tenderest Pity and Concern over it, and at length fell a Victim to the divine Displeasure when she had filled up the Measure of her Iniquities. And *Rome, Imperial Rome*, the Envy and Terror of the World, and the Instrument of *Jerusalem's* Destruction, was itself not many Ages after, over-run by barbarous Nations, the Foundations of her Strength and Renown having been first undermin'd by the most shameful and extravagant Luxury.

I now proceed,

2dly, To consider the pernicious Effects of an excessive Indulgence to sensual Pleasures with Respect to *particular Persons*; and this, in Regard of their bodily Health, their secular Interests, and their moral and religious Character.

1st. An Addictedness to sensual Gratifications has ordinarily a very bad Influence on our *bodily Health*.

This most valuable Blessing of Life and the Foundation of all the rest often falls a Sacrifice to excessive Pleasures, as they naturally tend to weaken the Nerves, exhaust the Spirits, and impair the Vigour of the Constitution. And a Person that has been any time devoted to soft Indulgence and relaxed with Indolence, cannot bear those occasional Fatigues, no more than discharge those necessary Duties, which are not to be avoided in such a World as ours; not to reckon
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up the numerous Accidents and Hazards to which a blind and eager Pursuit of Pleasure generally exposes those who are engaged in it, and which sometimes prove fatal to them; for when we have once laid the Reins on the Neck of our Passions, we put an absolute Power into their Hands to carry us wherever they will at all Adventures. And notwithstanding our daily Observation convinces or might convince us, that Crowds of Company sumptuous Banquets and unseasonable Hours, are followed with a train of Diseases in the Rear, yet the sparkling Liquor, the enchanting Musick, and Enterprises of Gallantry, have such irresistible Charms, that when consecrated by numbers, and back'd with Importunity, they soon overbear the sober Purposes of the Morning. Youthful Passions urge and stimulate each other, and prevent the still Dictates of Reason, the gentle Voice of Conscience, and the friendly Precepts of Religion from being heard in the Tumult; and thus we are in Danger of going from one Stage and Gradation of Wickedness to another, as long as our Passions retain their Vigour, that is, till our Health falters and decays: But at length the Constitution being shattered and broken, such Men are made to *possess the Iniquities of their Youth*, and find that by indulging to irregular Pleasures, they have rendered themselves incapable of enjoying those that are reasonable and innocent, and probably sink under the Weight of

of Diseases of their own procuring, and die Martyrs to their Lusts and Vices.

2dly, An excessive Taste for Pleasure is very prejudicial to our *secular Interest*.

Pleasure is an expensive Pursuit, by which many have speedily squandered the Estates their wiser Fathers gained by honest Industry, or increased by prudent Oeconomy. It branches out into a Variety of Extravagances, each of which has its Temptations and Inconveniences attending it, and which grow upon a Man insensibly; One Expence of this kind seldom comes alone, but leads on to another, Men being generally in some degree uniform in their Follies and Vices, whatever they are in their Virtues. So that if we are once captivated by the Vanity of being *Men of Taste* and Politeness, our Dress and Furniture and Table (and Equipage if we are of Rank to have any,) must be in the newest Mode whatever Expence attends it; Till at last Disgrace is intailed on our Name, and Distress on our Family; and even under Want and Infamy, the Disposition cleaves to us, and not being gratified, reduces the Man to the lowest Degrees of Contempt and Wretchedness, and perhaps drives him headlong into some desperate Measures, that bring him to an untimely End or some publick Punishment.

But if the Consequences should not prove so terrible and fatal as I have just represented, yet unbounded Pleasures occasion a vast Waste and Havock of our Time, that Time
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which is allowed us for the grand Purposes of Life, and for the infinitely more important ones of Eternity: But (at present) confining our Views to the present Life; it takes up our Time that should be employed in that particular Pursuit wherein we are engaged for the Service of ourselves our Families or the Publick, whether it be manual Labour, or Trade, or Commerce, or any learned Profession. It takes off our Attention from our main Concerns, and fills our Heads and Hearts with the vain Blandishments and Amusements of Life, occasions us to lose Opportunities which others embrace, to come behind them in every valuable Attainment, and prevents our arriving at a considerable Degree of Eminence in any Branch of substantial and useful Knowledge; besides that it frequently stains our Character, blemishes our Credit and Reputation, and deprives us of that good Opinion and Confidence of others, which is necessary to our Success in any Calling or Employment.

And even suppose we are above all Business, yet it will introduce such Disorders and Confusion into our Families and Affairs as cannot easily be repaired, and will prove of the most pernicious Influence to our Children and Dependants. Nor ought they who have as yet no Households of their own to think themselves entirely unconcerned in this Argument, if they have the least Thought of ever having any; as it is very likely to prevent
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their entering into such Alliances, as might be most conducive to their Interest and Honour, for Persons of Prudence will hardly esteem them fit to be trusted with their Children in the Marriage Relation who are under the Dominion of such irregular and expensive Habits. But,

3dly, What is worst of all is, that such a predominant Love of Pleasure has the most fatal Effects on a Man's *moral and religious Character.*

Setting aside all other Disadvantages this alone is enough to alarm and terrify every rational considerate Creature, who knows he is living for Eternity. This World is the first Stage of our Existence, but we are going forward to a vastly superior one, if we do not sink ourselves into a State of Sensuality and Wretchedness by the Way. It is here the Mind is to be cleansed and purified from the Pollution which naturally cleaves to it, and to be trained up for the most refin'd and exalted Delights. The amiable Graces of Meekness and Humility and Benevolence, and a generous Contempt of the World, an ardent and unfeigned Love of God and Man, an uniform Desire of being and doing Good, and of improving and advancing in all the Branches of a divine and heavenly Temper, are not likely to flourish in a Heart immers'd in sensual Pleasures. Religion is too tender and delicate a Plant to thrive in so rank a Soil. There is reason to keep a strict Watch over ourselves,
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that our Minds are not defiled by the necessary Intercourse we are obliged to hold with Objects of Sense in our Passage through the World, how much more then to abstain from such Indulgences that are criminal either in Kind or Degree, and that unavoidably taint and corrupt us?

The Strength and Beauty of the Mind is to be preserved and increased as that of the Body, by proper Exercise and Application, and by avoiding such Things as impair its Health and Vigour. Our moral and intellectual Powers cannot expand, and try their Strength, and stretch their Pinions in so gross and foul an Element as is most suitable and grateful to our depraved fleshly Appetites. It is Retirement and Contemplation, and frequent Converse with spiritual Themes and Objects, with perfect Spirits above, and especially with the great *Paternal Spirit*, that must improve the Faculties of the Soul, exalt its Ideas, extend its Views, and qualify it for the refined and sublime Employments and Delights of that blessed State, for which it was designed, and after which it should be continually aspiring. And nothing more apparently discovers the low Opinion we have of the heavenly Happiness, or the little regard we pay to the necessary Qualifications for it, as our groveling with so much Satisfaction in the mean and sordid Delights of Sense.

As for those who look upon the future Happiness in the Light of a *Turkish Paradise*,

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or who have been early initiated and constantly educated in the School of sensual Pleasure, who have been led on by the Example of their nearest Relations, and perhaps their *wise* Parents, to esteem the Gratification of their Senses, and the Indulgence of their Appetites and Passions, the principal Aim they were to have in View—they are truly Objects of Compassion and Commiseration, we pity and lament their Infelicity, whilst we despair of their Recovery to a better and more manly and christian Temper of Mind; no Wonder the gay and glittering Objects of Vanity and Ambition dazzle their Eyes, and charm and transport their Hearts; no Wonder they are *given*, and given up to Pleasure, are led Captive in its soft and silken Chain, insensible of their Bondage, and unconcerned for Liberty.

But methinks, I do not utterly despair of making and leaving some good Impressions on such an Audience as this. Have you forgot the wise and faithful Care and Tenderness which was expressed in the Education of many of you? How the Principles of Religion were early instilled into your Minds, as more worthy your Regard and Reverence than all other Principles whatsoever? Have you forgot that you were instructed and enjoined, to retire in the Evening of the Day, especially the Lord's Day, for Prayer and reading the Scriptures, and recollecting the serious and useful Truths of which you had been hearing; and that what you were enjoined by your Parents Commands,

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you were instructed and encouraged in by their Example? Have you no Remembrance of the calm and serene Satisfaction you have felt in such Seasons of devout Retirement? Or however, have you no reason to believe your Parents felt a sublime Pleasure in such genuine Exercises of their Piety and parental Affection? And can you really persuade yourselves, that such Employment turned to no good Account, or that the modern Employments of the Evening, which are often protracted till Midnight, in Cards and Company, at *Plays* and *Assemblies* and *Operas*, are more wise or manly, or elegant, more becoming the Dignity of rational Creatures who are tending towards Immortality, more improving to the Mind, more conducive to the true Enjoyment of Life, to the flourishing State of Business, to the Order and Oeconomy of Families, and to the Decorum and good Behaviour of Children and Servants? I am sorry such Questions as these need be asked of Persons, who still come up with us to worship the *God of their Fathers*? And wonder *they* blush not to worship in the Places their Fathers worshipp'd, who lead Lives so contrary to what their Fathers led? For my own Part I know not, whether to be most ashamed or astonish'd, to see Persons come into our *religious Assemblies*, under a Pretence of Purity of Worship, who are frequently to be heard of in Places that bespeak no great Sanctity of Life or Manners.—But Fashion and Custom are the *Phantoms* that frighten the Youth

Youth of the present Age out of their Understandings and the best Principles of their Education, and draw them into the most absurd and preposterous Conduct. And because some Persons have been, and still may be justly ridiculous for their Singularity in what is weak or whimsical, they are frightened to the last Degree, for fear of appearing singularly wise and good, for fear they should be laughed at by Rakes and Libertines, who are themselves the Scorn and Contempt of all Men of Sense and Sobriety.

I am inclin'd to think, that were it not for the bewitching Charms of Fashion and Custom, that is of doing as others do, be it ever so foolish or ever so hurtful, we might easily perswade our Youth, that have been well educated, that sensual Pleasure indulged to Excess, is the lowest and most vexatious Pursuit in the World, that it is tedious and lingering in its Approach, insipid or surfeiting in the Possession, and loathsome and odious in its Consequences, and that nothing which will not bear the Reflection and Examination of the Mind and Conscience, can be a fit Happiness for Man. But before the Trial is made, good Nature and an easy credulous Temper often incline them to think what so many at their Age covet and pursue, must have something in it desirable, and when they are once embark'd, they are presently attached to their Company, soon contract an Intimacy that is not easily broken off, grow gradually more under the Power of Appetite,

and perhaps there is a Sort of unhappy Pride in not treading back the wrong Steps they have taken, which effectually prevents their Retreat. Having once engaged they esteem it a *Point of Honour* to persist, though it be to their utter Disgrace and Ruin, or at least to the imminent Danger of it.

But surely they ought to consider *their* Rashness and Obstinacy will not alter the Nature and Tendency of Actions, they only entangle themselves and impair their Strength so much the more, the longer they delay to extricate themselves; and a few Years will wipe the Paint off from the Harlot's Face and shew her Wrinkles, will make them despise the Opinion of those, they now so highly value, and cause them to wish they had never deserted the Paths, and forsaken the Footsteps of their pious Ancestors.

But whatever gay and giddy Youth may be weak enough to do, O! let not us of advanced Years, who have sworn Allegiance to our Lord and Maker in the most solemn Manner, and by repeated Vows engaged ourselves to him, return again unto Folly! Shall we who have tasted the Joys of Faith, be enslaved by the Pleasures of Sense? Don't we recollect the divine Entertainments of retired Hours, the solemn Ordinances and Sacramental Transactions of the House of God? Have we felt and yet forgot the inward Satisfaction rising high in our Hearts, in close Communion with God, the lively Joy we have found in a Sense of divine Love and an Assurance of his everlasting Favour?

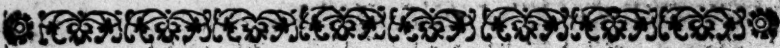
Favour? Let us therefore look down, Christians, with a sacred Indifference and Contempt on every carnal Delight, let our Thoughts ascend to God, and fix on him as our Portion and Happiness, let the ardent Desire of our Souls be to him, and to the Remembrance of his Name, and vent its pious Breathing in some such devout Language as that, *My Soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, O when shall I come and appear before God!*





S E R M O N XII.

Of Declensions in Religion.



R E V. ii. 4.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.



THESE Words are Part of the Letter our Lord directed his Apostle *John* to write to the Angel or Minister of the Church of *Ephesus*, wherein we find that it happen'd in this Society as it does in almost every other, that there was so much Good with such a Mixture of Evil, that though in some Respects they were deserving of Praise, yet in others they were worthy of Blame. What the Apostle therefore saw commendable in them, knowing the inimitable Candour and Compassion of his divine Master, he mentions first; ver. 2, 3, *I know thy Works, and thy Labour and thy Patience, and how thou canst*

not

not bear them that are Evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles and are not, and hast found them Lyars: and hast borne, and hast Patience, and for my Name's Sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Here is a fair Account of several very amiable Qualities, such as Diligence, Patience, and Perseverance in Religion, and (which seldom happens) Zeal founded in Knowledge and guided with Discretion.

But forward as our gracious Lord was by the Hand of his Apostle to commend, he was as faithful to reprove—that being as much the Part of a Friend, and as great an Instance of Affection as the other. It is indeed a Province of so nice and difficult a Nature that no wise Man would undertake it unnecessarily; but when it is apparently deserved, it ought not to be declined through a false Modesty on the one Hand, though it ought to be performed without any of that Rigour and Bitterness, which may justly give Offence on the other.

And perhaps we shall no where find an Instance of finer Address, or greater Fidelity and Tenderness in this delicate Office of reproof, than in the Case before us; Where the Apostle in the Name of our Saviour, begins with commending the Church of *Ephesus* for what was exemplary in their Conduct, *ver. 2. I know thy Works and thy Labour and thy Patience, &c.* Then introduces his Reproof in the softest and mildest Language, *Nevertheless*

I have somewhat against thee, ver. 4. After which he follows it with a close Exhortation, *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent*, ver. 5. adding to this Exhortation the Sanction of a solemn Threatening; *Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his Place*, And still lest this Language should appear too severe, he concludes with testifying his Approbation of another Disposition which he discovered in them, which he mentions to their Commendation and Honour; *But this thou hast that thou hatest the Deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*, ver. 6. Thus beginning and ending his Reproof with Praise, he wraps up the bitter Pill in Honey to make it go better down. And indeed such faithful friendly Admonition *does Good like a Medicine*, which though compounded of distasteful Ingredients, yet being skilfully prepared and seasonably applied, is very salutary to the Soul; and notwithstanding they be nauseous at first, will do us *good in the latter End*. *Faithful are the Wounds of a Friend* (a).

That which our Lord here reprehends in the Church of *Ephesus*, is the Abatement of their Love to God and Religion, *I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first Love*; left it, not lost it, not utterly forsaken the Object, but greatly failed in the Degree. There was sincere Love at the Bottom, though it was considerably cool'd and incumber'd,

(a) Prov. xxvii. 6.

ber'd. It was not *Love out of a pure Heart fervently*, it did not glow in their Hearts with that Life and Ardour it should do, and as it had done; but was like a dying Coal, scarce sufficient to warm the many Embers with which it was surrounded.

Thus the Words are connected. I proceed therefore to consider them with Relation to spiritual Decays in general, and as applicable to particular Persons as well as to Christian Churches. And here I shall enquire,

I. What they may be suppos'd to import.

II. What is the Duty of those whom they immediately concern.

III. Apply them in order to Instruction and Practice.

I. I am to enquire what these Words may be supposed to import.

And you may observe that they do not contain a Charge against the profane and profligate Part of Mankind, but against the truly good and pious. As to the former, our Blessed Lord hath not only *something*, but many Things *against them*; and looks upon them with an Eye of Pity and Indignation; *being griev'd for the Hardness of their Hearts*; against them he hath a much heavier Charge to bring than this; their wilful Ignorance and Carelessness, their Contempt of his Religion, and Obstinacy in Sin; the Dishonour they cast on his Name, and Gospel, his Authority and Worship, their *trampling*

pling his Blood under Foot, bidding Despite to the Spirit of his Grace, rejecting the Counsel of God against themselves, and counting themselves unworthy of eternal Life; these Things he observes and resents, and will hereafter call them to a strict and impartial Account for; but the immediate and direct Subjects of the Censure in the Text were *real Christians*, as plainly appears from the foregoing Observations on the Context. And,

1. This implies more than a general Charge of Imperfection.

In this Sense indeed the Charge is true against every human Creature. For *there is not a just Man on Earth that doth good and sinneth not (b).* And if we say we have no Sin we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us (c). And with this divine Testimony our own daily Experience too unhappily concurs. But when we read such a Text as this, we ought not to gloss it over slightly with (*Humanum est errare,*) *no man is free from Frailty*; that is true enough, but not the Truth of the Text, or what is here intended, nor need that have been said with any particular Solemnity.

Were a Man with an Air of Seriousness to accost us in such a Manner as this, —
 ‘ Sir, you are a good Man, and my very good
 ‘ Friend, nevertheless I have something against
 ‘ you,’ and upon being asked what it was,
 should reply, — ‘ He meant only to say you
 ‘ are

(b) Eccles. vii. 20.

(c) 1 John i. 8.

'are a weak and fallible Creature,' would not such an Address be deemed impertinent and trifling? Might you not after such a Salutation justly expect to have been tax'd with some particular Miscarriage or general Neglect? So that the Charge prefer'd against the Church of *Ephesus* of having *left their first Love*, must include something more than the Imperfections and Frailties common to the best of Men.

2. Nor does this Charge seem to intend such Irregularities as are disallow'd, oppos'd, and repented of.

Some People of tender Spirits and a melancholy Cast of Mind are too apt to apply scriptural and providential Rebukes personally and particularly to themselves in all their Severity and Terror. By the intimate Acquaintance they maintain with their own Hearts, they become very sensible of the slightest Failings, and by daily Meditations on God and his Attributes, have awful Apprehensions of the Demerits of them, and perhaps from a Consciousness of some particular evil Habit which too easily besets them, tho' they continually watch and strive against it, they are dispos'd to pronounce *bitter Things* against themselves, not sufficiently considering that God *knoweth our Frame, and remembereth that we are Dust*, and will have Compassion on our Infirmities, our unallowed and lamented Weaknesses; such for Instance as many smaller Irregularities of Passion, wandering Imaginations in the Exercises of Piety and Devotion, vain and wicked Thoughts

Thoughts rising in our Hearts, but which are check'd and not indulg'd, hasty or inconsiderate Words, owing to the suddenness or surprize of Temptation. Such failings as these are incident to the best Christians, and tho' they are Reasons for our constant Humility and Watchfulness, yet they are not to be considered in the Light of *wilful* Sins, nor ought we to condemn ourselves as hereby breaking our Covenant with God.

For although our Lord *Jesus Christ, whose Eyes are as a Flame of Fire* in the midst of his Churches observes, yet he is far from aggravating and resenting the unwilling Infirmities of his upright Servants; it not being agreeable to the infinite Benignity and Compassion of his Nature, to make the worst of their Imperfections, especially where he sees their evil Nature is discern'd, and genuine Repentance working in the Heart. But,

3. These Words may be consider'd as a Charge brought against backsliding Christians, whose Decays and Declensions in Religion are apparent, and who are less sensible of or affected therewith than they ought to be.

As if our blessed Lord should say; ' O thou
' Professor of Religion, thou Member of the
' Christian Church, thou converted and sancti-
' fied Soul! I know thy Faith and Patience
' and Zeal for mine Honour; *nevertheless I*
' *have somewhat against thee.* I don't charge
' thee with Hypocrisy or Insincerity in Reli-
' gion; I don't say thou art no Christian, that
' thou

‘ thou hast not the Love of God in thee, or
‘ art destitute of saving Grace; I don’t pro-
‘ nounce thee a Reprobate, and call thee a
‘ *Worker of Iniquity*; But I charge thee with
‘ being a defective declining Christian, Thou
‘ art not so compleat in thy Faith and Know-
‘ ledge, nor so steady and exemplary in thy
‘ Course of Obedience as thou shouldest be.
‘ It would advance thy Honour and Interest
‘ to examine thyself and call thy Sins to Re-
‘ membrance; for wer’t thou better acquaint-
‘ ed with thine own Heart, thou wouldst dis-
‘ cern many Spots and Blemishes there, which
‘ thou art now too little aware of. The State
‘ of thy Soul better deserves thy Attention than
‘ many Things that take up so much of thy
‘ Thoughts and Time.—Neither the World,
‘ nor thy familiar Acquaintance, nor thy most
‘ intimate Friend, even the Friend of thy Bo-
‘ som hath any Thing against thee, but I
‘ have; I know the first Symptoms of thy spi-
‘ ritual Disease, and its gradual Progress, and
‘ the Declensions it has occasioned. My Eye
‘ enters with thee into thy Closet and secret
‘ Chamber, as well as into the Place of Bu-
‘ siness and Diversion, the World and the
‘ Church of God. I know the Company
‘ thou keepest, the Steps thou takest, and all
‘ the secret Inclinations and inward Motions of
‘ thy Heart. None in all the World knows thee
‘ as I know thee, nor hath the same Affection
‘ and tender Concern for thee as I have; nor
‘ hath done, or is able to do so much to se-
‘ cure
‘ cure

' cure and promote thine eternal Salvation.
 ' Thou knowest not thyself so well as I know
 ' thee, and lovest not thy own Soul so well
 ' as I love Thee, having redeemed thee to
 ' God by my Blood, and being desirous of
 ' purifying and sanctifying thee by my Spi-
 ' rit. I do not forget also the Love thou bear-
 ' est towards me, and the Regard thou disco-
 ' verest to my Name and Honour. — *Ne-
 ' vertheless I have somewhat against thee.*

And whose Heart now has not some se-
 cret Misgiving that the Charge may be level-
 led at *him*? Who will stand forth and say, He
 is confident his Love and Fidelity to *Christ*
 have been so pure and unshaken, so lively and
 vigorous, as to give no ground of Jealousy to
 the blessed Redeemer, that we admit a Rival
 with him in our Hearts, or that the Flame of
 our Affection to him is abated? Has there been
 that inflexible Attachment to the Honours of
 his Name and Character, that high Esteem of
 his incomparable Worth and Excellence, that
 humble, devout, affectionate Gratitude for his
 dying Love, that meek Submission to his Au-
 thority and Will, that chearful and active Zeal
 in his Service, as we once professed and disco-
 vered? Is our Converse with him as intimate
 and frequent and delightful as it was wont to
 be? Is there nothing done or omitted by us
 in the various Stations of Life wherein we
 are engaged, that should occasion a Coldness
 or Reserve when we come into his immediate
 Presence? Can we approach him with that
 Cou-

Courage and Confidence as when we first laid open our Breasts before him, and made an unreserved Surrender of our Souls into his Hands? Can we appeal to him as *Peter* did in answer to such a Question as that, Am I the *supream* Object of thy Love? *Lord thou knowest all Things, thou knowest that I love thee.*

Or have we not Cause to confess that a sluggish and indolent Temper has taken hold of us, by reason of which we are less *fervent in Spirit*, and more lifeless and inactive than we used to be? that our Mind and Heart have been too much engrossed by sensible Objects? that tho' Time is hastening away and Eternity approaching we have made very little if any Progress in our Way to Heaven? *that while the Bridegroom tarries, we have been slumbering and sleeping* and in the mean Time the Enemy has sown his Tares? Has not God some occasion to address us in the Language of the Prophet *Hosea*. (d) *O Ephraim what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee? For your Goodness is as the Morning Cloud and as the early Dew that soon passeth away:* Or to upbraid us in the Language of the Prophet, *I remember the Kindness of thy Youth the Love of thine Espousals, when thou wentest after me in the Wilderness, in a Land that was not sown: What Iniquity have you or your Fathers found in me that you are gone far from me, have walked after Vanity and are become vain* (e)? Nay do we not sometimes secretly
breathe

(d) Hof. vi. 4.

(e) Jer. ii. 2, 5.

breathe forth some such Complaint against ourselves as this, *Oh that it were with me as in Months past (f) !*

Well Christians if such is the Case, This gentle, this compassionate, this affecting Admonition and Rebuke of your Redeemer, is addressed to *you*, to warn you of the languishing State of your Graces, to rouse you under the Beginnings of those lethargic Symptoms, that might otherwise prove fatal to your Souls ; Let me therefore bespeak your most diligent Attention whilst,

II. I shew you what is your immediate Duty and Concern in such Circumstances as these. And

1st, Be thoroughly sensible of this Condition.

You say *you have acknowledged it already*, but consider it again, for we cannot be too deeply convinced of that which so nearly concerns our everlasting Peace and Welfare.—

‘ Come then O my Soul, and let us consider
 ‘ how Things stand between thee and thy
 ‘ God. It is high Time this was known and
 ‘ consider’d ; My Friends are often enquiring
 ‘ after the Health of my Body, why should
 ‘ not I as solicitously enquire after the vi-
 ‘ gour and welfare of my Soul ? Whether it
 ‘ prospers or languishes ; increases or declines
 ‘ in Faith, and Hope, and Joy, whether I
 ‘ go backward or forward in Religion ?’ If
 we are averse to this Scrutiny, there is too
 much

much ground to suspect that all is not right within; and that we decline it because we cannot bear the Search and are afraid of the Issue. ‘ And O my Soul tho’ I hope there is
‘ some good Thing in thee towards the Lord
‘ God of Israel, yet I fear he hath also some-
‘ thing against thee! Art thou not grown more
‘ indifferent in his Service, and in thy Re-
‘ gards to the Duties and Obligations of it
‘ than thou hast heretofore been? Whence
‘ does this arise? What is the Occasion that
‘ this heavenly Plant is withering? God is
‘ not less gracious, the Saviour is not less ami-
‘ able or condescending, the Ways of God
‘ are not less excellent, nor thou my Soul of
‘ less value, than formerly thou wast; the
‘ Engagements of Religion are as reasonable
‘ and the Joys of it as desirous and divine as
‘ ever. By what indulg’d Temptation then
‘ hast thou thus been led off from God? My
‘ Conscience tells me I find not those holy
‘ Fervours in Prayer, that sweet Relish in
‘ divine Ordinances I once found. There
‘ must be some sinful Neglect, some criminal
‘ Indulgence, some Failure or Irregularity, or
‘ there would not be such secret Damps, such
‘ fearful Misgivings, such sad Suspicions of
‘ Heart, nor should I be such a poor dejected
‘ drooping joyless Creature as I am.—Search
‘ then, O my Soul, search this Matter to the
‘ Bottom, as thou regardest the Honour of
‘ thy God, the Credit of thy Profession, and
‘ thine own Safety and Happiness.

T

2. Affect

2. Affect yourselves with the Unhappiness of your present Circumstances.

We should not only endeavour to know our Condition, but lament and lay it to Heart ;
' O, what a sad Alteration do I find ! From
' whence and whither am I fallen ! How warm
' were my Affections once, how serene my
' Hope, how substantial my Joy, when God
' first revealed his pardoning Love to my Soul,
' and pacify'd my troubled Conscience ! How
' deeply sensible of the high Obligation ! How
' low did I lie in the Presence of God ! How
' vigorous were the Sentiments of Gratitude
' and Fidelity I then felt and form'd ! And
' with what a sacred Ardour did I set forward
' in my Journey towards the heavenly *Canaan* !
' —But alas what is become of me
' now ! How does my Love for *Christ* and
' Zeal for his Glory wane and languish ! —
' Where O my Soul, hast thou lost thy
' Strength, and Vigour, thy Hope, and Stead-
' fastness ! —And what are all thy worldly Ac-
' quisitions to thy spiritual Declensions ! What
' ever Figure thou makest in the World, ah !
' what a poor dead fearful wretched Crea-
' ture art thou before God ! How many of
' thy Fellow-Christians dost thou see outstrip
' thee *in every good Word and Work* ! What
' heavenly Delights do they taste in a con-
' stant holy Walk with God, which thou hast
' forfeited by forsaking him ! —And, O my
' Soul, hast thou not in a great Measure with-
' drawn from him a Heart thou didst once
' consent

consent should be only and entirely his? and wilt thou thus rob God of what he claims by unalienable natural Right, and by thy own voluntary Surrender? Did'st thou not vow sincere and perpetual Love and Obedience, and profess to hope for all Things in him and from him, and dost thou repent of these Engagements, and put the World in his Place! and prostitute the very Talents and Mercies he hath bestow'd upon thee, in the Service of another Master!—Blush and be ashamed, O my Soul; where is thy Wisdom, thy Truth, thy Honour, thy Gratitude! Is this thy Kindness to thy Friend, canst thou charge him with Unfaithfulness or Unsteadiness in his Affection or tender Concern towards thee? Has he been as a dry Desert or a barren Wilderness? Darest thou accuse or dost thou suspect him of the least Falsehood or Treachery to thee? O no, thou well knowest his Perfections and his Love are unchangeable, that his Mercy is from Everlasting to Everlasting, and that he will not break his Covenant for ever, or suffer his Faithfulness to fail. But has thy Love been unchangeable like his? Hast thou treated him as thou oughtest to have treated thy own and thy Father's God? And what would become of thee if he should resent thy Coldness and Neglects as they deserve, if he should be as regardless of thy Interest as thou hast been of his Honour? If he should forsake thee as thou hast forsaken him? Trem-

' ble O my Soul at the Thought, awake out
' of thy Supineness, for remember *thy Salva-*
' *tion slumbereth not.*

3. *Repent and do thy first Works.*

Examine the Path by which thou wentest off from thy God, and go back the same Way by which thou wast led astray. A Traveller that hath lost his Road and finds himself wandering, stands still, and recollects when and where he was sure he was right; and returns by the very same Tract, however tedious or irksome it be to him, and perseveres in returning till he finds himself right again, and then with more Vigilance and Resolution pursues the well-known Road that he may recover the Time he hath lost. Just so should'st thou act in the present Case. *Stand in the Way and see, ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way? and walk therein, and ye shall find Rest for your Souls* (g). Repentance is only a turning into the good Path we had forsaken, and persevering therein with greater Care and Diligence for the Future.

Every Step thou takest in the Way thou art now in, leads thee further from God and Happiness, increases thy Guilt and Danger, and renders thy Return more difficult. Thy Heart will be more estrang'd and alienated from God, thy Sense and Relish of divine Things more faint and languid. Be speedy therefore in the Execution of this Resolution to return. Whoever defers Things necessary to
be

(g) Jer. vi. 16.

be done, never does them so easily or well as he might at first. Besides who knows what may happen. How God may be provoked with us and how difficult we may find it to regain the Light of his Countenance, and Manifestation of his Favour? And what if in the mean Time we should be visited with Sickness or Pains and the Symptoms of Death? What a distressed State will the Soul be in then! How heavy will the Thought of this continued Estrangement sit upon our Hearts! How terrible will be our Dismay, our Fears, our inward Stings, and Self-reproaches! And with what Horror will the Soul be fill'd at the Apprehension of appearing in the Presence of its *slighted* Saviour and *disgusted* Friend, who is also to be its Judge, before the Breach is healed, and its Submission has been made and accepted?

4. Renew your Covenant Engagements to the Lord's.

When you have disclaim'd the Backslidings that have expos'd your Weakness, and *fled for Refuge to lay hold of the Hope set before you*, and find your Soul abhors the Iniquity that hath betray'd and bewilder'd you, and hath renounced it in every Shape and Appearance; then with all Lowliness and Self-abasement offer yourself to God by a renewed personal Dedication; 'O Lord, *I am thy Servant, truly*
' *I am thy Servant*, tho' I have forfeited the
' Honour of that Character by acting unsuitably to the Obligations of it, I have basely

' deserted thy Family and despis'd thy Favour!
 ' But, O! receive a returning Prodigal. *I have*
 ' *gone astray like a lost Sheep, but seek thy Ser-*
 ' *vant, for I do not forget thy Commandments.*
 ' I desire sincerely to return to the sacred Fold
 ' of the great Shepherd and Bishop of Souls, with
 ' a Heart determin'd never to wander more.
 ' O, do not utterly forsake *me*, tho' I have
 ' forsaken *thee*! *Depart not from me who am*
 ' *a sinful Man, O Lord.* I have done very
 ' foolishly. O that I had been more thought-
 ' ful and never remitted my Vigilance! Then
 ' thy Grace would have preserved me in the
 ' Day of Temptation. Then I should not
 ' have offended my God, griev'd my best
 ' Friend, and wounded my own Soul.—
 ' But now Lord take away my Sin, and
 ' once again be reconciled, I cast myself at
 ' the Foot of Mercy, and give up myself in-
 ' tirely to thee; O, do not despise the *Sacri-*
 ' *fice of a broken Heart!*

Lastly, Our Repentance and Dedication
 should be accompanied with frequent and
 earnest Prayer, and unremitted Endeavours af-
 ter greater Vigilance and Stedfastness.

Let our Wanderings teach us Wisdom; gain
 something by your Slips; quicken your Pace
 when you are recover'd, and set a special
 Guard against those Weaknesses and Tempta-
 tions that have seduced you. It was through
 a Neglect of Prayer and Watchfulness, that
 you first became an inconstant, then a back-
 sliding Christian. Therefore watch unto Pray-
 er,

er, and pray that you may watch more diligently : Call in fresh Supplies and Succours from above to quicken and establish you. Trust to no supposed Acquisitions or Attainments in Religion ; and let nothing that you may have gain'd in the least abate your Zeal and Vigour. Keep your Eye fixed on your Defects, and on them that excell you. Think nothing done, whilst any Thing remains undone ; and thus let the Breach be so repair'd as never to be opened again ; for a thorough Penitent will not be satisfy'd even with a Sense of Pardon, unless he feels a prevailing Bent of Heart to God, whereby it fixes upon and cleaves to him as the Centre of his Rest and Joy.

I shall now conclude the Subject with a few practical Inferences. And,

1. From what hath been said we learn how great is the Danger and Deceitfulness of Sin.

Any one Sin not only blinds the Understanding, hardens the Heart, and perverts the Judgment of the wicked, (who are the *willing* Slaves of it,) but hath the same Effect in a lower Degree, on the Righteous and Upright, and imposes even on those Hearts that are guarded with the Love and Fear of God. It besets them between the Hours of their Watchfulness and Prayer, for however strict the Injunction be, the best Christians find it difficult to watch and pray *always* ; and if they do not, Sin insensibly insinuates into their Hearts, gains Admittance before they are

aware, and leaves its Taint and Poison behind, which stains their Characters, corrupts their Minds, and renders them more disposed to admit and indulge it again. Thus are they gradually drawn aside from their Duty, indisposed to the most solemn Exercises of Communion with God; and perhaps are not sensible of this Spiritual Decay, till some severe Affliction awaken and alarm them; and then upon serious Recollection they find they have *left their first Love*, and that however specious their outward Profession may have been, that the great Searcher of Hearts *hath something against them*. Therefore

2. We see the Necessity of a cautious Fear.

Happy is the Man that feareth always (b). And *blessed is he that watcheth (i).* Because the most wary Christian is always the safest, most out of Danger of those Sins which rob him of his religious Peace and Consolations.

Nothing exposes to more Danger than Presumption. For giddy unexperienc'd Professors to be confident and self-sufficient, is no strange Thing; that young and untry'd Converts, who have just listed themselves under the Banner of *Christ* should be forward and fearless, is not to be wonder'd at, their great Zeal and little Knowledge plead strongly their Excuse. But for those that are *Veterans* in the Christian Warfare, who have known the Subtilty as well as the Power and Malice of their

(b) Prov. xxviii. 14.

(i) Rev. xvi. 15.

their spiritual Enemy, and have had frequent Experience of their own Weakness, for them who have not only begun well, but who have run and fought well for a long Time, and have maintained their Christian Character with distinguish'd Honour, and (it may be) have been the Envy of many other Christians, and are ready to seize on the heavenly Prize, for them, I say, at last to become careless unguarded and presumptuous, and in Consequence thereof fall off from their Spirituality and Watchfulness and *leave their first Love*, and lose their former Impressions of divine Things — this is a sad and lamentable Case indeed; and deeply inforces upon our Hearts those solemn Cautions, *Be not high minded but fear (k)*; and *let him that thinketh he standeth take Heed lest he fall (l)*. Surely *he that trusteth in his own Heart is a Fool (m)*. The unhappy Falls of *David* and *Peter* should be a perpetual warning to us, who I believe will hardly pretend that we equal the one in Piety, or the other in Zeal.

A short but very affecting Expostulation was that of our Saviour to his Disciples, when they were just upon the Point of deserting him, and of being carried down the Torrent of popular Opinion which ran strong against him, *Will you also go away (n)*? ‘ You whom I ‘ have favour’d and honour’d so long with ‘ my Presence and Instructions? You who ‘ have

(k) Rom. xi. 12. (l) 1 Cor. x. 12. (m) Prov. xxviii. 26. (n) John vi. 67.

' have professed and done and suffer'd so much
 ' for me? You who are so well acquainted
 ' with my Doctrine and Miracles? You who
 ' have no Reason to doubt my Affection, and
 ' when I have had no Reason as yet to doubt
 ' of yours; I can bear the severest Scoffs and
 ' Reproaches of open and declared Enemies,
 ' but how can I bear Unkindness from you,
 ' to be slighted by those I so tenderly love,
 ' to be despised by those I have chosen, to be
 ' deserted by those I came to seek and save?
 ' Will you retort my Affection upon me as
 ' a pointed Arrow to pierce and wound my
 ' Soul? Have I endured, and am I likely to
 ' endure so little for you, that you distrust
 ' and deny the Pretensions I have made, that
 ' I came to be your Saviour and Friend?—
 ' *Will you also go away?* Think of this, O
 Christian, when thou art tempted to renounce
 thy Lord, and immediately reply with the
 Apostle Peter, *O whither shall we go? thou
 hast the Words of eternal Life.*

3. How happy are they who are uniform and constant in their Christian Profession.

Who keep themselves in the Love of God (o), and are filled with the Fruits of Righteousness to his Praise and Glory (p); who are upright also before him, and keep themselves from their own Iniquity (q).

Believe it Christians, there is nothing will minister more to our Comfort and Joy, than a close and steady Walk with God in the Practice

tice of universal Duty. Nothing therefore is wiser than to resolve, in the Name and Strength of *Christ*, that no Temptations shall divert us from so happy a Purpose, because *he that walketh uprightly walketh surely* (r).

And it should greatly excite us to this, to observe how chearfully, as well as exemplarily such Christians live; how serene their Minds, how ardent their Devotions, how lovely their Tempers! how free from distracting Thoughts, perplexing Cares, and unequal Burdens! how animated in their Services! how *patient in Tribulation*! They bless God daily, and daily are they blessed by him. Obedience and Faith are their Employment and Delight, and the Smiles and Love of God their Consolation and Refuge; unruffled in all the Events of Life, and untterrify'd at the Views of Death, humble and penitent under a Sense of Sin, but happy and joyful in the Hopes of Pardon thro' *Christ*, and in the firm Expectation of eternal Life which he hath purchas'd and promis'd.

Such is the steady and watchful Christian—
Ah! How unlike him the uncautious, wavering and inconstant one: How feeble his Hopes! How distressing his Apprehensions! How frequent his Doubts! How obscure his Evidences! How uncomfortable his Soul! How unprofitable his Life! How fretful in Adversity! How vain in Prosperity! And how disconcerted and dismay'd at the Thoughts and Prospect of dying! —His Soul like a withering Oak blasted

ed with Lightening, or set in a dry and barren Soul, is languishing, deform'd, and fruitless. Whilst the vigilant regular steady Christian flourishes, *as a Tree planted by a River of Water, that bringeth forth Fruit in its Season, whose Leaf also doth not wither, and whatsoever he doth, prospers.* His present Fruitfulness is honourable, his future Happiness will be everlasting.

Lastly, This should quicken us to prepare for the Happiness of Heaven.

There will be then no Clouds of Error or Ignorance in the Understanding, no wither'd or languishing Graces, no Impediments or Clogs on the active Powers of the Soul. When we bid adieu to this Scene of Vanity and Temptation, of Weakness and Pollution, we shall lay aside *the Garments spotted with the Flesh*, and put on *change of Raiment.* *Our Robes shall be washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb.* We shall not then be cumbred with this Load of Flesh, or envelop'd and bewildered in the Mists and Fogs of Sense. We shall have no corrupt Appetites to occasion Guilt or Fear, or the least Misgivings of Mind, in our nearest Approaches unto, or closest Intercourse with God. We shall have no contrary Principle to drag us downward when we are soaring aloft in those happy Regions of unerring Contemplation and unmingled Fruition. There will be no Spots and Blemishes in the Services we offer to our God and Redeemer. No Fickleness or
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Unsteadiness in the Ardour of our Affections, and consequently the all-cheering Light of the divine Countenance will shine upon us with a steady and unvarying Lustre; no Frowns shall be seen in the Face of God to raise our Jealousy of his loving Kindness towards us, for as there will be no Inconstancy on our Part, there will be no Suspension of divine Manifestations on his.

Here in this World our best Frames are transient and fluctuating, the liveliest Exercise of our Graces is sometimes succeeded with Days of Deadness and Darkness; Storms of violent and suitable Temptation greatly disturb the Serenity, if they do not taint the Purity of the Soul, like the *chilling Blasts* of Winter to the delicate and tender Plant, tho' ever so carefully watch'd and shelter'd. There is no Security in this World for the most establish'd Christians against tempestuous Seasons, other than what arises from Watchfulness and Prayer under divine Influence and Protection: But blessed be God! there is a Harbour of Rest to which we are gradually tending. The happy Day is hastening towards us on the Wings of Time, when *our Warfare shall be accomplished*, when the Graces of the Soul which are now in their State of Infancy and Non-age shall be grown up to a full Maturity, when no Temptation shall be admitted to assault us, and all the Rivals of a Saviour's Love in our Heart shall be discarded for ever. When the languid Flame of divine Affection, we
now

now cherish with so much Difficulty, and under so many Incumbrances, shall be bright and illustrious, and our Hearts and Songs be perpetually united in the most exalted Exercises of undecaying Love and never ceasing Praise.





S E R M O N XIII.

Of the Abuse of National Privileges.

(A FAST SERMON.)



I S A I. V. 7.

For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant; and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression, for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.



HIS Passage of Scripture is the Conclusion of a beautiful Parable, wherein under the Emblem of a Vineyard, curiously planted and carefully dressed, is represented the Nation and Church of the *Jews*, who by a sacred Enclosure were separated from the ignorant and idolatrous World, to whom the Mind of God was revealed and his Oracles committed, and among whom he chose in a peculiar Manner to dwell,
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for their Defence and their Glory. Hereupon it was natural for him to expect that his Vineyard should have yielded Fruit, that after so much Pains and Culture bestow'd, and such extraordinary Privileges conferr'd on it, they should have been attended with some answerable Improvement.

But behold the Disappointment of the Lord of the Vineyard, *ver. 4. He looked that it should bring forth Grapes, and it brought forth wild Grapes!* He expected kindly and excellent Fruit, but found that which was corrupt, as bad or worse than none.

Upon this his Repentments were awaken'd; as they had long rioted in his Bounty, abus'd his Patience and contemn'd his Justice, as they had wanted no Means or Advantages for Improvement and yet had neglected all, growing more harden'd under the Methods us'd to mollify them, he was determin'd to bear with them no longer. *I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard; I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the Wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste, it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up Briars and Thorns; I will also command the Clouds that they rain no Rain upon it; ver. 5, 6.*

And the Reason of this so long deserv'd, and at length appointed Severity is assigned in the Text. Because *this Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, this pleasant Plant*, was become degenerate and unfruitful; that is, *the House of Israel,*

Israel, and the Men of Judah, were not only undistinguish'd for their Virtues, but were full of Oppression and Unrighteousness.

And now are these Things recorded for *their* Sakes only, or for the Sake of others also, who are favour'd with, and may be in Danger of abusing the like Advantages? Doubtless *they are written for our Admonition, upon whom the Ends of the World are come (a).*

Nor is this the only warning of the kind which the Word and Providence of God hold forth to our View; we have many other Instances of Churches and Nations forfeiting and losing the peculiar Privileges of God's Love and Mercy, by which they were once eminently distinguished. What is become of those seven famous Churches of *Asia*, to whom the Epistles in the Book of the *Revelations* were directed? Where are the Churches of *Corinth*, *Philippi*, and *Thessalonica*, which once enjoy'd the Gospel Light and Truth, but are now the Seats of Darkness and Error? *God having removed his Candlestick out of its Place.* Nay what is become of the Church of *Rome* itself, once celebrated for the Purity of its Doctrine and Worship, now *the Mother of Harlots and Abomination of the Earth (b)*? You may have heard of the Churches of *Bohemia* and *France*, and the terrible Desolations that have befallen *them*, who are all so many ancient and awful Ruins to awaken us, *to whom the same Salvation is sent*, to a becoming caution,

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(a) 1 Cor. x. 11.

(b) Rev. xvii. 5.

tion, that as we are favour'd with like Privileges, we do not forfeit them in the Manner they have done.

But I proceed to make some more particular Remarks on this Passage of Scripture chiefly arising from the Observations that have been already offered to illustrate it. And,

I. It is a very apt and lively Metaphor to denote *the peculiar Care which God takes of his own Church and People.*

A wise Man who plants a Vineyard, chuses an agreeable Situation; lays out his Ground in a proper Manner, incloses it for Beauty and Safety; prepares and enriches the Soil, and after bestowing upon it all needful Labour and Cultivation, stocks it with the finest Plants for choice and valuable Fruit.—And thus did the blessed God act towards the People of the *Jews*. He gather'd them out of all the Nations of the Earth; enlighten'd them with the Knowledge of his Will; appointed them a peculiar Form of Government and Worship; and on Condition of their Loyalty and Obedience, made them many great and glorious Promises of Mercy and Favour which he never failed to perform. *To them pertained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenant, and the giving of the Law, and the Service of God, and the Promises; whose were the Fathers, and of whom as concerning the Flesh, Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever (c).*

And

And in like gracious Manner hath the blessed God behaved towards us, who are now become as the *Jews* were of old, his chosen People, his Heritage, his peculiar Care, dignify'd and distinguished not indeed by the same, but by much greater Privileges than they. And thus in whatsoever Nation *he records his Name*, and sends his Gospel, and reveals his Son, there he *plants a Vineyard*, and erects a Kingdom, there he confers Blessings and Privileges which the common World intermeddle not with, and appears as *the God of all Grace calling Men to his Eternal Glory by Jesus Christ*.

II. Upon whatever People God bestows peculiar Privileges, *from them he entertains peculiar Expectations*.

The Husbandman expects not to reap where he hath neither plow'd nor sown, it is not in the fallow or uncultivated Ground that he looks for his Harvest to arise; nor does the Vine-dresser seek his Fruit in Plants that grow wild by the Road-Side, but from those he hath pruned and watered with his own diligent and skilful Hand, that is, where he hath bestowed extraordinary Care and Cultivation there he looks for extraordinary Increase. And thus the blessed God expects not supreme Love or inward Veneration from the ignorant and benighted World, but from his own Church and People he does; from them on whom he causes his Sun in all its Glory to arise and

shine, and the kindliest Dews of heavenly Grace to descend and rest, he does expect Fruit in its finest Flavour and greatest Perfection, for *to them he hath given much and of them therefore much is requir'd.*

And these Expectations are always proportionable to the Advantages Men enjoy, and their Capacities for improving them, unless by the long Abuse of their Privileges, they have rendered themselves incapable of making such an Improvement, in which Case their Incapacity is their Reproach, as well as their Infelicity, and is so far from excusing that it aggravates the Guilt of their Unfruitfulness: And God in his righteous Displeasure may, and often does give them up to that Blindness and Hardness which they have voluntarily contracted by an unnatural Abuse of their Means and Mercies; till their Eyes become dim that *they cannot see*, and their Ears deaf that they *cannot hear*, and their Hearts gross that they *cannot understand*, and they no longer remain susceptible of those Impressions which *might have converted and healed them.*—After this God does not expect the Fruits of Righteousness from such Persons, considering the Hardness and Impenitence of their Hearts, and despairing of the Success of any farther Attempts to improve or reclaim them: He knows that they are steel'd against the most friendly Counsel, and the most faithful Reproof, that they are bound so fast in the Chain of their Sins that no Assistance short of
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a Miracle can restore them to Liberty, he therefore as an awful Example to others and in just Judgment to themselves, permits them to go on *treasuring up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath and Revelation of his righteous Indignation.* †

But from those who are still favoured with special Privileges; and are yet in a Capacity to improve them, he certainly looks for a proportionable Increase. Where his Grace comes and continues he expects it should be receiv'd and improv'd; where his Light shines with distinguish'd Lustre he expects it should dispel the Mists of Darkness and Error. And there is a moral Fitness that these Effects should be produced by such Causes, as there is a natural Probability that Ground properly cultivated and planted, warm'd and refresh'd with seasonable Showers and Sunshine, should produce proportionable Fruit, that is the Expectation in both Cases is equally just and reasonable. But,

III. *These Expectations of God from a People highly favoured, are often times greatly disappointed.*

Thus it was with respect to the Jewish Church, *He looked for Grapes, and behold wild Grapes; and for Judgment and behold a Cry,* that is, the cry of the Oppressed for deliverance, or of Sin for Vengeance. Divine Ordinances had no Success, the Prophets of God whether sent with Messages of the most tender

and unmerited Mercy, or armed with the Thunder of omnipotent Vengeance, were slighted and disregarded, and all the Instances of his paternal Affection, as well as the fundamental Laws of his Kingdom were violated and despised. They were guilty of the grossest Stupidity and Idolatry, of the most shameful Murmuring and Discontents against God their Saviour, notwithstanding all the signal and *miraculous* Appearances of Providence in their Favour for a long Course of Years.

And happy would it be for us, could we justly pronounce this Complaint to have been peculiar to that Church and Nation alone, instead of having so much Reason to fear that the same Charge is applicable to many other Churches and Nations, and even to ourselves.

Here then it may be proper briefly to enquire,

When the Expectations of God from a professing People, may be said to be disappointed?

And it must be remember'd, that this is spoken *after the Manner of Men*, because it is not possible any Event should happen in reality, contrary to what God expected. He *knows the End from the Beginning*, having the whole Series of Causes and Effects, both natural and moral, at one View under his Eye, with all their possible Powers and Variations. The Meaning therefore is, and God's Expectations from his People are then said to be disappointed,

appointed, when they act in a Manner unworthy their distinguished Advantages, and by which Men who cannot foresee Events, would *actually* be disappointed.

More particularly when the best Means of Edification are not attended with any suitable Improvement; when the Word of God preach'd and press'd with great Propriety and Authority, leaves Men as thoughtless and careless as it found them; when they turn a deaf Ear to the most friendly and awakening Instructions, as the Inhabitants of the old World did to the awful Predictions of *Noah*, and the *Jews* to the Preaching of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles; or when sacred Institutions only produce in them some Respect to the Form and Profession of Godliness; when Men want to commute with their Maker, and instead of *Righteousness Judgment and Faith*, are for tything *Mint and Anice and Cummin*, and failing in a Conformity to the Essentials of Religion, expend great Zeal in the Ceremonials of it. When neither the Understanding is enlightned, nor the Will renewed, nor the Conscience cleansed, nor the Heart changed, nor the Life reformed; where there is no Principle of Faith planted, no Fruits of Repentance produced, no inward Fear or genuine Love or true Obedience to the blessed God discernible, but only *a Name to live*, a mere lifeless Round of external Services, barely sufficient to denominate a Man *almost a Christian*,

then may God be said to be disappointed in what he looks for from a People peculiarly favour'd with the glorious Light and Privileges of the Gospel, because much more than this might have been reasonably expected from them, by one who could not have foreseen their Behaviour.

And what now is the Reason that so many remain unfruitful under the most suitable and singular Means of Improvement?

This must undoubtedly be owing to the Neglect either of *Ministers* or *People*, or to resume the Metaphor in the Text, the Fault must lie either in the Dresser or the Soil of the Vineyard; for the Plant itself is of so generous and noble a Nature, that were it not for the Defect of these, it would certainly bring forth Fruit to Perfection.

Possibly then the Fault may in great Measure be owing to the *Vine-dresser*. He that is appointed to keep the Vineyard may be unskilful or unfaithful, ignorant or careless or mercenary. The *Jewish* Priests were so degenerate that they caused the Offerings of the Lord to be abhorred (d). And the Prophet gives this Account of the Shepherds or Pastors of *Israel*. His Watchmen are blind, they are ignorant, they are dumb Dogs, they cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, given to Slumber. Yea, they are greedy Dogs which never have enough; they all look to their own Way, every one for his Gain from his Quarter (e). So saith the Prophet

(d) 1 Sam. ii. 17.

(e) Isai. lv. 10, 11.

phet Jeremiah, the Pastors are become brutish and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prosper, and their Flocks shall be scatter'd (f). Again, in Metaphor suited to the Allegory of the Text, *Many Pastors have destroyed my Vineyard, and have trodden my Portion under Feet, they have made my pleasant Portion a desolate Wilderiness* (g).

And what a melancholy and heart-affecting Thought is this! That we who are intrusted with the rich Treasure of the Gospel, and under our great Master, with the Salvation of Souls, should be unfaithful to our Trust! that for the sake of any low Indulgence, or sordid or selfish Views, that thro' a proud or a party or an indolent Spirit, either our Instructions or our Examples should be destitute of that Authority and Attraction, with which genuine Piety and a disinterested Benevolence would inspire them! O that those Words of the Prophet were ever present with our Minds! (b) *Woe to the Shepherds of Israel, who eat the Fat and clothe themselves with the Wool, but feed not the Flock; the diseased have they not strengthened, nor healed the Sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought again that which was given away, nor sought that which was lost, but with Force and with Cruelty have ye ruled them.*

But though this may be our Reproach and your Calamity, yet it will rarely save or excuse you.

(f) Jer. x. 21.
xxxvii. begin.

(g) Jer. xii. 10.

(b) Ezek.

you. People under such publick Means of Instruction and Salvation as we enjoy, need not perish though their Teachers do. They are not all *dumb Dogs*, and *unfaithful Stewards*, they do not all fleece the Flock and starve it; nor are they all to be accounted *blind Leaders of the Blind*; but if they were, yet we are still blessed with the Oracles of God, and the Understandings of Men.

It is to be feared then, the Fault generally lies in *the Soil*. The Seed of the Word instead of being received into *good and honest Hearts*, is often cast into the *high-way*, where it is picked up by the Birds of the Air, or trodden under Foot, or falls among *thorns and brambles*, which quickly grow up and choak it, or upon a *rock*, where for want of Earth to fix its Root, it perishes.

But to dismiss the Metaphor; Barrenness among professing Christians is generally owing to themselves, to their own Carelessness or Inattention, their worldly Cares, their Love of Riches, or their Love of Pleasures, to their naughty defiled unbelieving Hearts, which *regard Iniquity, hatch Falshood, and bring forth Wickedness*. Satan's Temptations and the Dictates of corrupt Nature hearken'd to and complied with, weaken and pollute their Souls, draw them into Unbelief or Formality, into dangerous Delays, or a fatal Deadness in Religion, whereby they are soon brought to a customary and contented Neglect of Duty, to *restrain Prayer*, and to grieve the good Spirit of

of God, until they become altogether unprofitable.

IV. *When God is thus disappointed in those reasonable Expectations he entertains of his favour'd People, he justly resents it.*

These Words, *What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes?* This, I say, is an Expostulation carrying in it the Expression of a just Resentment, which is more clearly manifest in the subsequent Threatening, *that he would take down its Wall and Fence, and lay it waste and common.*

Aud now, O Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye Men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my Vineyard. He appeals to themselves, and makes them Judges in their own Cause. As if he had said; 'Have I not warned
' and exhorted you? Have I not followed my
' Exhortations with Promises and Threaten-
' ings? proved you with Mercies and Judg-
' ments, to awaken you to a becoming Sense
' of your Duty and Danger? and yet all to
' no Purpose! your Hearts are as vain and
' trifling, and treacherous and faithless as ever!
' Such Perfidiousness is not always to be en-
' dured, I cannot shut my Eyes to your Ini-
' quities, or stop my Ears against the Cry of
' your Sins. O then let not my long abused
' Patience be a Means of hardening you to
' an Insensibility of my Displeasure! lest I
' finally kindle all my Wrath to your unutter-
' rable

‘rable Dismay and everlasting Ruin. For he
 ‘that is often reprov’d and hardeneth his Neck
 ‘shall suddenly be destroyed and that without Re-
 ‘medy (i).’

V. *When God expresses his Resentments against an ungrateful and unfruitful People, it is ordinarily so as to leave room for Prayer and hope of Mercy.*

He does not immediately come to Extremities; he threatens long before he strikes the fatal Blow; Judgment is his work, his *strange work*, his act, his *strange act*, He is *slow to Wrath*. Nay when the Sentence is just ready to be executed, and God is on the very point of Departure, still there is room for Intercession; and in the Threatening itself he is pleas’d sometimes to give a distant Intimation of Mercy. His Command to Moses, *let me alone that I may destroy this People (k)*—was it not an Encouragement to Moses not to let him alone? when he saith, *How shall I give thee up Ephraim (l)? How shall I deliver thee Judah? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine Heart is turned within me and my Repentings are kindled together.* What a manifest Struggle is there in the divine Breast, (as it were) between Mercy and Justice? How backward and reluctant is God to consign them over to utter Destruction? And in the denunciation of Judgment in
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(i) Prov. xxix. 10. (k) Exod. xxxii. 10. (l) Hos. xi. 8, 9.

this Chapter, he calls *Israel his Vineyard* and *Judah his pleasant Plant*, and does not that furnish the Sons and Daughters of *Israel* and *Judah* with an Argument that he would not utterly destroy his own *Vineyard*, or root out his *pleasant Plant*? The Parable of the barren Fig-tree is very much to the same Purpose, which at the Intercession of the Vine-dresser had the Respite of another Year granted it, even after the Sentence of Excision had been pronounced.

When there are such Intimations of Clemency and Compassion in reserve under threatening Calamities, what remains but that with a humble Faith and Importunity we immediately seize and improve the golden Remnant of Mercy? saying;—‘Adored be thy Name, O
 ‘thou forbearing God, who not only givest
 ‘us Permission but Invitation still to supplicate
 ‘thy Throne; which darts a Gleam of Hope
 ‘that thou art not yet inexorable. O Lord,
 ‘to us belongeth Confusion of Face because we
 ‘have sinned against thee; But to thee the Lord
 ‘our God belong Mercies and Forgiveness, tho’
 ‘we have rebelled against thee. And now O
 ‘Lord, according to all thy Righteousness, we
 ‘beseech thee let thine Anger and thy Fury be
 ‘turned away from thy People, and hear the
 ‘Prayer of thy Servants and their Supplications,
 ‘and cause thy Face to shine upon thy Sanctu-
 ‘ary, for the Lord’s Sake (m).’

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(m) Dan. ix. 8, 9, 16, 17.

If it be asked what does the Lord our God require from us in such Circumstances? I answer, what a Father expects from an ungrateful Son, a Master from an unfaithful Servant, a King from his factious Subjects, that or what is agreeable to that, a Covenant God expects from a backsliding People; I mean, Fear Honour Loyalty Gratitude genuine Repentance, renewed Exercises of Faith, real acts of Holiness and Obedience, a Heart broken and affected for Sin, and a Life of correspondent Love and Duty.

VI. When all the Means that are used to awaken and reclaim a People become ineffectual, and they still remain incorrigible, *God at length pronounces their final Sentence*, and will see that it be fully executed.

Then the Language is, *Ab! I will ease me of mine Adversaries (n).* Thus saith the Lord, *Such as are for Death deliver them to Death, and such as are for the Sword to the Sword, and such as are for the Famine to the Famine, and such as are for the Captivity to Captivity (o).* For though Moses and Samuel stood before me, to intercede for them, yet my Mind could not be towards this People; cast them out of my Sight (p). I will take away my Kingdom from them and give it to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof (q). I will have done with this Nation, though Noah Daniel or Job were in it, as I live,

(n) Isai. i. 24. (o) Jer. xv. 2. (p) Jer. xv. 1.
(q) Matt. xxi. 43.

I live, they shall deliver neither Son nor Daughter, they shall but deliver their own Souls by their Righteousness (r). It is a People of no Understanding, therefore he that made them will not have Mercy on them, and he that form'd them shall shew them no Favour (s).

Thus their Doom is seal'd and their Condition desperate, God departs from them and proceeds to execute the Sentence that had been so long suspended, (for he is faithful to his Threatenings as he is to his Promises;) *I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard, I will take away the Hedge thereof and it shall be eaten up, I will break down the Wall thereof and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, neither shall the Clouds rain any more upon it. i. e. I will remove from them these despised Mercies, and resent the Dishonour they have done to my just and gentle Authority; since they would not hear, they now shall not; the Hardness and Infertility which was before their Folly, shall be their Punishment; to the Impenitence which they have chosen will I leave them; the Blindness they have contracted shall henceforth be judicial; they have outliv'd my Patience, and their Day of Grace; and there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation that shall devour them.*

And if we duly consider the extraordinary Privileges this now abandoned People of the

Jews

(r) Ezek. xiv. 20.

(s) Isai. xxvii. 11.

Jews had enjoy'd, the amazing Patience exercised towards them, the repeated Warnings they had disregarded, how willing God had been to hearken to the Intercessions of others in their Behalf when they would not intercede for themselves, and his Readiness to suspend deserved Judgments upon any, even the least Prospect of their Amendment ; if we consider these Things, together with their inflexible Stupidity and heinous Ingratitude and increasing Wickedness, instead of looking upon such a Sentence as rigorous and severe, we shall find Reason to stand amazed at the Clemency of God, in bearing with them so long, and shall bear our Testimony to the Justness of that Expostulation, *What could I have done more to my Vineyard than that which I have done !* * If any Means had been left that were
‘ likely to reclaim them they had not perish’d ;
‘ if any Methods either of Entreaty or Authority had remain’d to work upon them, they
‘ had yet been spared ; but it seem’d a necessary Vindication of my own Honour, that
‘ such repeated Provocations should not go
‘ finally unpunish’d, lest the attending World
‘ should have charged me with unjust Partiality to them, because I had once chosen
‘ them for my own People.’

And now it is more than time to apply the Subject in a manner suitable to our own Case, and the Occasion of this Day’s Solemnity.

And

And I. Let us learn to be more sensible of the singular Mercies and Privileges whereby the Providence of God hath distinguished us.

Great Britain is the *Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts*, and the People of *England* his pleasant Plant. The Lord hath commanded his Blessing upon us, open'd to us his good Treasure, and made us the Head and not the Tail among the Nations (k). No Kingdom under Heaven is so happy as we in its Immunities Rights and Privileges, or the Security we have of the uninterrupted Enjoyment of them, and no People (thank God!) have a juster sense of Liberty both civil and religious, or a warmer Zeal to maintain it. For this a true *Briton* will sacrifice every Thing else that is dear to him. An innate and invincible passion for Liberty, and a rooted and irreconcilable aversion to Tyranny, is the characteristick of our Country; a Spirit which under God hath many a time rescu'd and re-established our expiring Liberties, and hath struck terror into the Hearts of the Invaders of them. Even our Enemies confess our native Bravery and bear Testimony to our jealousy over our Privileges; and the *English* History can furnish out names of Renown in this field of Honour not inferior to the Patriots of antient *Rome*. And as the offspring of Liberty; Learning Arts and Commerce have no where flourished more than in *Britain*, owing very

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(k) Deut. xxviii. 12, 13.

probably to our impregnable situation and the excellent form of our Government. Providence has indeed looked upon us with a beneficent Eye, and with an indulgent and liberal hand pour'd its richest Blessings on our Island; so that we are the Envy of our Neighbours, who from a thirst of Ambition and lawless Rule, want nothing but power and opportunity (which God grant they may never have!) to rob us of the choice Fruits of that Liberty which they never tasted.

And yet what is all this in Comparison of those religious Privileges by which we are exalted above other Nations? We are no less distinguished by the *Grace* than by the *Providence* of God.—We have the free use of our Bibles, a Privilege which as Christians we can never be sufficiently thankful for; those *wells of Consolation* are to us free and flowing, which to others are a *Fountain seal'd*. We have moreover the Liberty of God's house and Ordinances, to hold our solemn Assemblies as well as to pay our more private Devotions, in such manner as our Bibles and Consciences direct; and these Privileges have been so long enjoyed, that we have had Time to search into the foundations of our Faith and immortal Hopes, to gain greater assurance of the Truth and Excellency of our divine Religion, and to free its Doctrines and Precepts from those corrupt glosses and mixtures, with which they had been adulterated in the times of *Popish* darkness and superstition.

To

To all which I may add, we have many amiable living Examples of Piety and Righteousness continually before our Eyes for our Encouragement and Direction in the ways of God. Blessed be his Name pure and undefiled Religion hath not yet altogether forsaken our Land! For though I am deeply sensible of the Degeneracy of the present Age, and am grieved to see true Christianity so much despis'd by contented Ignorance and Stupidity, and disown'd by bold Profaneness and Infidelity, deform'd by the proud-spirited Enthusiasm of some, and dishonour'd by the Lukewarmness and Formality of others, yet I am firmly persuaded there is real inward vital Religion still remaining among us.

God hath given us uncommon Proofs how much the Preservation of our Religion and Liberties are still his peculiar Care. We yet feel the Impression of our Fears excited by our late Alarms and Confusion; * when Providence held forth as it were an even Ballance, no one being able to guess whether the Scale of our Salvation would sink or rise; at length (for a while) to our Grief and Astonishment it rose, and our Sins sunk the opposite Scale! The Enemy prevailed, and with them our Fears came upon us like a Deluge; the *Abjects* gathered themselves together on all Sides, and certain

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* This Sermon was preach'd Jan. 7th, 1746-7. being the Fast-Day on account of the continued War with France and Spain, next after the Suppression of the Rebellion.

lewd and desperate *Fellows of the baser Sort* joined them from all *Quarters*, till this pleasant Land, the Seat of Liberty and Religion, seem'd destin'd to be a field of Carnage and Desolation; a Crisis that not only excited the apprehensions of all sober and thinking Men in our own Country, but engaged the attention of all the Countries of *Europe*.

And what was it that put a Stop to the Progress of the Rebels, and defeated the Designs of our perfidious Invaders? What fill'd our trembling Hearts with Comfort, and turned the Confidence of our Enemies into Terror? What chas'd away our Fears, and chang'd our Lamentations into songs of Deliverance and Triumph? What (next to the infinite Compassions of our God!) but our Humiliation Repentance and Prayer; the united Supplications of all good Men and Protestants of every Denomination among us, meeting at the Throne of God's Mercy, pleading in some such Language as this, '*Give ear O Shepherd of Israel, thou that dwellest between the Cherubims, and leadeſt Joſeph like a Flock; behold the Vineyard thy own right Hand hath planted and the Branch that thou madeſt ſtrong for thyſelf, why haſt thou broken down her Hedges, ſo that the Boar out of the Wood doth lay her waſte, and the wild Beaſt of the Field devour her? Return we beſeech thee O God of Hoſts, look down from Heaven the Habitation of thy Holineſs and Glory, and behold and viſit this Vine (l).* Where

is

(u) Pſal. lxxx.

is thy Zeal and thy Strength, the sounding of thy Bowels, and of thy Mercies towards Us?— Such Cries as these daily and almost incessantly ascending from Earth to Heaven, from the people of God in their closets, and in the Sanctuary, pierced the ear of the Almighty, and gained upon his gracious Heart. Surely (says God,) *I hear Ephraim bemoaning himself, thou hast chastized me, and I was chastized. Is Ephraim my dear Son? Is he a pleasant Child? Since I spake against him I earnestly remember him still, therefore my Bowels are troubled for him, and I will surely have Mercy upon him* saith the Lord (w). In consequence of this, one Weight (if I may be allowed the Expression) was thrown into the Scale of Mercy after another, till it preponderated with our compleat Salvation. God raised up a royal Youth to be the illustrious Instrument of vindicating the Honour and saving the Crown of his Father, sent him forth with Courage, and brought him back with Conquest, having pour'd the long delay'd Vengeance on the heads of those wicked Men, who had threatened our Estates our Laws our Constitution and our Religion, and were insolent enough to aim their stroke at the Throne itself, nay at the life of that great and excellent Prince who fills and adorns it.

Could I have produc'd (what it would have been worth any one's time and pains to have kept,) an exact and faithful Register of all the memorable Interpositions in Favour of this

X 3

Nation,

(w) Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

Nation, since the accession of the late King, or even since the grand Incendiary of *Europe* declar'd War against his present Majesty, I should then have been able to present to your View an amazing and astonishing Series of providential Wonders, display'd and wrought at the most critical Junctures and in the most seasonable manner for our Salvation and Deliverance; but we can all recollect enough to shew us our Obligations to the Favour of God, the efficacy of Humiliation and Prayer, and the invaluable Privilege of being continued the *Vineyard of the Lord*, planted by his Hand and guarded by his Eye.

Well! these are some of those privileges with which the good Providence of God hath distinguish'd us; and how must we expect to have them *still* secur'd to us and transmitted to our Posterity? I answer,

2. By endeavouring to maintain our interest in God their great Giver and Guardian.

And that can only be done, by bringing forth the Fruits of Righteousness in proportion to the Cultivation he hath bestowed upon us. Thus shall we remain his sacred enclosure in which he will delight to walk and dwell, and gather the pleasant Fruits of his own most gracious and indulgent Care.

Here my Friends, lies our Safety and our Honour. It is this alone can continue us a free and flourishing People, as it is this must preserve our Relation to God and our Interest
in

in his Protection, without which our excellent form of Government, our Laws and Polity, our Wealth and Commerce, the number and bravery of our Troops, and all the Felicity of our natural Situation and acquir'd Strength, will avail us nothing. It is the Favour and Protection of Heaven alone that can make all these avail us, or which can be to us instead of them all.

What rendered *Israel* safe and happy? what encreased their Wealth and Renown and extended their Territory? what made *them* triumphant, and their Enemies tributary? was it not their relation to God and their Interest in him? *They got not the Land in Possession by their own Sword, neither did their own Arm save them, but it was God's right Hand, and his Arm, and the Light of his Countenance, because he had a Favour unto them* (x). And what reversed this? What changed their Glory into Shame, and their Beauty into Deformity? What scatter'd them among the Heathen, till they became a Reproach to their Neighbours and a Scorn and Derision to them that were round about them? What reduced *them* to the state of Captives who had so often been Conquerors? and what desolated them at last, and reduced this garden of God to a contemptible Common, scatter'd them all the World over, and made them a *Hissing* and a *By-word* among the Nations?—Why it was their Impenitency, their Apostacy, their Corruption

(u) Psal. xliv. 3.

ruption and incurable Degeneracy.—Learn O Britain, learn of *Israel* and *Judah*, from the Ruins of the once fair and beloved City of *Jerusalem* learn, from the present despicable and vagabond State of her few remaining Sons, learn the infinite difference between the Favour and Anger of God. O! secure the one, avert the other, whatever thou doest, *so shall thy Land yield her Increase, thy Sons be as Plants grown up in their Youth, thy Daughters as Corner-stones polished after the similitude of a Palace, thy Garners full, affording all manner of Store, thy Sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in their Sheep-walks, thine Oxen strong to labour, and no breaking in or going out or complaining in thy Streets (y).*

But if we continue an unreclaim'd and degenerate People notwithstanding so many and great Mercies, graciously bestowed and signally preserv'd and renew'd to us, our Privileges will be so far from saving us, that they will encrease our Danger, and at length inance our Ruin. (z) *If God spared not the natural Branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee: Well because of Unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by Faith; Be not high minded but fear. For behold the Goodness and Severity of God, on them which fell Severity, but towards thee Goodness, if thou continue in his Goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. O therefore let us humbly deprecate the divine Displeasure! Warn'd by the Judgments,*
and

(y) Psal. cxliv. 12, 13, 14. (z) Rom. xi. 20, 21, 22.

and constrain'd by the Mercies of God, let us *present ourselves a living Sacrifice holy and acceptable to him which is our reasonable Service. Let us be instructed, lest his Soul depart from us, lest he make us desolate, a Land not inhabited* (a). Let us this Day unite our Interest at the throne of Grace, that God would avert his dreadful Judgments from us, that he would subdue our Enemies under us, *heal our diseased Cattle*, repair our remaining Breaches, and as a happy token of Mercy would revive the dying Flame of Religion in the hearts and lives of a professing People. By this means we may become a Strength and Security to our Land, and may prevail for our compleat Salvation ;——Or however if God in righteous Judgment, should see fit to destroy his Vineyard amongst us, on which he has bestow'd so much Cost and Cultivation in vain, we at least may hope to be of the number of those chosen and fruitful Branches, which before the Storm of his Vengeance falls, shall be removed into his sacred Enclosure above, where we shall enjoy a milder and a happier Clime, be surrounded with Plants that are ever fair and flourishing, and placed nigh to the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the *Paradise of God*.

(a) Jer. vi. 8.

F I N I S.



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